

Our Daily Loud Whispers

*An anthology of
Zimbabwean Short Stories*



Compiled and edited by
Mthokozisi Mabhena

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Mthokozisi Mabhena (ed)



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DEDICATION

To my mother, whose daily presence of her absence reminds me to look
within not without.

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the individual contributors who made this compilation a success.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The writing process is a cathartic experience primarily to the writer, who then transfers the experience to the reader through the paced tattooing of the reader's soul with the message the writer seeks to impart. Zimbabwe is not Robert Mugabe or Zanu PF or defined by its politics. If one pauses just for a minute and observe the lives of individuals, they will be amazed by the nuanced experience they will witness from each individual soul. The authors of this anthology address that. Some stories are interesting, some are bland, some have interesting plots and yet some have a simple thought. Some stories will make you laugh, whilst others will only manage to make you smile, and others will make you angry. This is exactly how our daily loud whispers are like.

The selection of stories for this anthology was deliberately biased in favour of variety in terms of genres and writing experience. Great and well published authors are included, and also, some authors, whose story is their first ever short story they have written are included as well. These stories cover a vast spectrum of what Zimbabweans go through, Nqobizwe writes about the daily life in a township, Reynold and Prince write about love, Natasha speaks to the struggles of women and Kelvin reminds us that our politics is not yet perfect. As I said, Zimbabwe is not defined by one brush stroke of politics or poverty but by daily lives of individuals, in order to understand us, listen to our daily loud whispers. Enjoy!

- **Mthokozisi Mabhena**

MAMGOBHOZI

Nqobizwe Malinga

Out of bed by the break of morning light, the baobab-sized woman never settled for more than thirty minutes within the premises of her own house. Her two large feet pounded the ground of Makhokhoba suburb at irregular directions, with her almost-empty handbag squashed under the hollow of her gigantic armpit.

She would collect unconfirmed news from one place, and add pepper and salt before delivering to another, mostly in a manner that portrayed her as the hero of whatever story. Spectacularly, the middle-aged female had a very small head, often enhanced in sight of size by a white beret that always hung to one direction. Within that small head, however, existed large files of township profiles, people's secrets, love scandals, stereotypical accusations and generally anything she found juicy enough for her ever growing audience. She was, as nicknamed, the local memory stick - the transporter of news. Mampofu - UnakaSenzeni, UMamgobhozi.

Not very far from her house this one morning, a man drives out of the entrance of his yard when he notices the enormous woman coming in. He stops his car, slides down the window and leans over to the bending figure which already had put on an overstretched smile.

“Good morning, MaMpofu, livuke njani?” he greets in his most humble tone. The two children in school uniform sitting on his backseat fighting over a lunch box are making so much noise that he barks at them, before turning his head back to the woman outside and resuming his grin.

“Morning, Themba, I can see you’re on your way to work, eh?” Mampofu returns the respect in her hoarse manly voice.

“Yes, I have to first get the little ones to school before proceeding to work. Are you looking for my wife?” Themba asks the obvious, still throwing subtle warnings with his finger to his younger kid who seemed to be generating the most punches at his older brother. “Yes,” comes the reply from MaMpofu, “Is she in?”

“Yes, Yvonne is in the house. Just proceed inside and knock. In the mean, I have to go. Lisale”

Themba bids, as he gradually accelerates and the Silver Corolla takes off. MaMpofu waves at the car as it disappears into the main road leading to town, before she trots into the yard towards the door, talking to herself.

There are, in general, three major things that Yvonne hated in her life - politics, mosquitoes, and most importantly, neighbours who came to visit in the early morning.

She was about to tuck herself back to bed after the tiring morning chores, when a knock on the door echoed throughout the whole house in a fashion and pattern she had already familiarized to one person.

“Awu bakithi!” she cursed as she dragged herself off the bed again. “Doesn’t she have anything to do other than disturb my peace everyday!” Yvonne rhetorically remarked to herself as she made her way to the door.

“You are sleeping, young lady, while the whole city is already in motion? You are not serious my friend!” MaMpofu joked as Yvonne

opened the door, stepping into the house with a chandelier laugh that made one's eardrums vibrate in protest. Yvonne wore her smile of sarcasm and offered Mampofu a seat close to the door.

"I'm very tired. You know how hard it is now that schools are open, having to bath three males all by myself!" Yvonne flagged her humour as well, forcing herself to laugh at least half the way Mampofu was popping. The duo exchanged greetings and ignited their womanly chat, which started from a lighter note on the weather and gradually drifted into personal affairs around the neighbourhood - with the aid the memory stick's narration skills, obviously.

It was about after fifteen minutes of whirlwind talk that MaMpfu broke the ice on the purpose of her visit.

"You know," she paused, took a sip of the tea she'd been served, and continued, "I've been willing to tell you something I noticed a while ago, makoti, something very important."

Yvonne leaned on the couch and braced herself for the next lie she was about to see slithering out of the huge lady's mouth. She giggled slightly and tied the straps of her nightgown.

"You always notice things, don't you?" she joked, "What is it?"

"It's about your husband, Themba." came the hoarse reply.

A short moment of silence followed with the only sound that resonated coming from the vibration of MaMpfu's lips as she sipped the last drop of tea on her cup, watching from the corner of her eye the reaction that emerged on her counterpart's face.

Yvonne knew for a fact that nothing from the mouth of NakaSenzeni was to be taken seriously, but at the mention of her husband's name, both curiosity and insecurity wrestled for dominance on her face. She leaned forward and fixed her eyes on MaMpfu's.

"What about Themba?" she asked, almost in an unfriendly tone - the same a child would do when falsely accused by another. MaMpfu snapped her fingers and pointed to the teapot that could be seen on the table close

to the kitchen door, signalling for a refill of her cup. Yes, more tea, more talk.

It was moments like these that MaMpofu found most amusing and enjoyable. The particular space of time in which her listener would ponder in suspense, waiting for her to get to the other end of the story. She would initially feel like a cookie jar placed at the highest shelf, watching from above the fruitless efforts of little children trying to fish from below. Watching as Yvonne made her way to the kitchen with both cups, she knew she was winning her attention.

The younger lady came back to the living room, placed a tea-filled cup on the table and wasted no time as she sat down. “Yes, what about Themba?” Yvonne asked as she settled down. MaMpofu put on a little smile, picked up the tea cup and spoke almost in a whisper.

“Not really about him, makoti, but I noticed that someone is eyeing your husband.” she said as she sipped. Yvonne, sighing and ejecting a sign of relief on her face, picked up her cup as well.

“Awu MaMpofu, everybody eyes somebody’s husband these days! Why the worry?” she noted, as she giggled triumphantly. MaMpofu giggled as well, and interjected.

“Yes, makoti, but what I’m telling you is very serious, and please mind, you won’t believe who I am talking about and what she has planned so far.” uttered the bulletin mistress.

At that point Yvonne needed not to say anything. Her blood-shot eyes and folded face would say it all. She was extremely unsettled now, and MaMpofu was not easing the situation. “Look, NakaSenzeni, if you’re going to beat around the bush....”

“Its Thembisile, the girl who used to work for you here as a maid. You heard she has started a business in Cowdray Park, right?” narrated MaMpofu, as she realized that her delaying tricks were not working

“MaMpofu...”

“Believe whatever you want to believe, Yvonne. I’m just here to help

you out. I have been noticing how she stands by the corner of the stadium almost every day towards dusk on purpose, waiting for Themba's car which always passes along that road. The man gives him a lift to the place where she now stays, near the tuck shop across the street, there, before he gets home, here to you. By the way, don't hold Themba responsible for anything, I doubt he's even noticing the whore's moves." Said Mampofu, with Yvonne's attention untapped.

"I initially was not going to say any of this to you," she continued, "but yesterday I heard my neighbour saying her new landlord has been complaining about how she has lately started strange practices around the house, what has been suspected to be some form of Voodoo rituals. Ubuthakathi!"

It was at this point that Yvonne shook with fear. She surely wasn't an entertainer of hearsay, but suppose there was any truth in what MaMpofu was saying, then her household was in danger, her life, for that matter - she thought.

"I don't believe you NakaSenzeni." The words managed to break out of her moment of shock.

MaMpofu let out a decent giggle, which eventually grew into her bombastic laugh as she struggled to catch her breath. She laughed so hard the couch shook countless times and squawked at the heaviness of her elephant weight. She laughed at the helpless expression on Yvonne's face - she knew she had won.

"Deny, but I've done my part as a good friend. In fact, you are like a younger sister to me, if not a daughter. Do you think Thembisile was happy with the way you dismissed her? After all, why did you dismiss her from working for you here if she is all 'trustworthy', huh? If she was capable of stealing your things here to the point of getting fired, what makes you think she cannot steal your husband? Its just that your husband is too generous," fired MaMpofu.

Silence.

Yvonne was defenceless. She knew Thembisile was not in good books with her, but wasn't sure if she would go to the extent of snatching her

husband, worst of all, through spiritual means.

The troubled young lady could not even hear the rest of the words that MaMpofu kept uttering, as she fell into deep thought, connecting pieces she knew were a bit too early to conclude on. MaMpofu bid her farewell upon drinking up her cup of coffee, and she saw her way out of the house, leaving the young woman half awake, and half-dead in thought.

That afternoon, MaMpofu had been wandering around the location when she came across a dark, stoutly built young lady. She immediately raised her arms and opened wide her eyes, shouting as if she spoke to one on the top of a mountain.

“Ah Thembisile! Is this you? You know I hardly see you these days since you stopped working at the Ncubes.” she exclaimed, as she offered her hand for a shake.

“Yes, NakaSenzie, It’s me. I’m just busy these days with my snacks project in Cowdray Park. Otherwise, how are you and everyone else?” The youthful girl asked. “By the grace of God we are surviving, sisi.” came the reply from MaMpofu. “Ehe!” She leaped out, pretending to have suddenly remembered something. “You won’t believe what that woman you worked for was telling me about you today.” She said, clicking her tongue in an attempt to sound empathetic.

“What is it?” Asked Thembisile in burning curiosity. MaMpofu looked around sideways to check if anyone was listening, before proceeding to give her hushed reply to the girl.

“Let me tell you everything as we walk to your house. My daughter Senzeni is somewhere close to the place where you stay, I’m going to fetch her.” Came the cold lie from the big woman.

The pair walked down street - talking, stopping, marvelling and resuming their walk.

It is evening now. A panting Senzeni speeds into her mother’s house, gasping for air as she shouts at the top of her voice.

“Mama!Mama! Come and see!” She tweets as she enters the kitchen,

where a relaxed MaMpofu is sitting on a chair, counting a few coins on the table. An attempt by Senzeni to come to a halt fails, and the young girl trips over a chair blocking her way and flies towards the cupboard, landing with a bang, backside first - with her skirt flying upwards to her head, revealing her oversized panty. She stands up, dusts herself and rubs the corner of her forehead which seems to have hit the handle.

“What is it?” MaMpofu asks her daughter who pretends not to be hurt. The girl struggles to catch her breath as she narrates.

“Police!..Police are..Police are at Mrs Ncube’s house!” Senzeni jumps up and down as she wrestles to get her words out.

Mother and daughter race out of the house in a seemingly entertaining sight as they rush to take a look at what happens outside. Across the street, a police van is parked by Themba’s house. A small crowd of people is gathered around in anticipation, hauling insults and curses. An officer escorts Yvonne into the passenger seat of the car, handcuffed.

“What happened?” NakaSenzeni asks her over anxious daughter who seems to be enjoying the movie.

“I heard Mrs Ncube was fighting by the corner of the stadium, mama. I heard she met Thembisile standing there, she was on her way to Cowdray Park as usual. They started shouting at each other and Thembisile slapped her. Mrs Ncube hit Thembisile with a rock on her head mama! I heard she is not moving!” the young girl, like her mother, enjoys as she tells the story.

MaMpofu holds the back of her head with both hands in shock. She orders the girl to get inside and lock the house.

A woman carrying a large sack of dried tobacco passes by, puts her sack down and addresses MaMpofu who still fights to catch a glimpse of the van as it drives off from the crowd.

“Mamgobhozi, what was happening here? I know, mngane, you know everything around here. What was the police car doing here? Kwenzakalani?” the woman, having missed the show, asks.

MaMpofu calls for her daughter to bring her sandals.

“You won’t believe what happened here, mngane” says the small-headed news mistress, “Let me escort you down the road and tell you the whole story....”

THE GRIM ESCAPE

Tafadzwa Mahachi

The day had passed quicker than we noticed and the heap of peanuts we were sorting was still as big. Evening breeze was already making its unannounced advent and this time with a loud chill that would run down the spine and sent my fingers shivering like one with arthritis. I had only filled eighty-five bags out of the daily hundred required of me. I was used to working overnights to meet my daily quota and I had carefully packed my coffee brown jacket I inherited from my father, the only thing I was allowed take after his demise. It had seen me through coldest days and even nights.

"Hurry up lazy one!, I don't want to spend the whole night here," rumbled Kizito the foreman. His short sermon was obviously directed to me. Most of my workmates were men. Tough men.

They had grown up in the farms and knew each other very well. They knew how to bribe the foreman and have him inflate figures on his worksheet. It was a hypocrisy they enjoyed as they were manned enough to

do the work by midday. They would shed themselves under some tree on a spot they would unanimously approve each day. There, they would drink maheu or scud while chanting and chatting. Stories exchanged were mostly farm compound gossip. Who took who's wife. Who was caught making out with who. Things I abhorred to hear.

I looked up to face the man who had summoned for my attention. There he was! In overalls half his length and huge gumboots as if it were a compensation. He released the last blow of a thick vapour of smoke from his black lips and the smell testified that he had just finished smoking.

To confirm my thoughts, he threw a stub of a rolled up newspaper, a homemade cigarette ugwini, to the ground and menacingly crushed it with his heavy gumboots. Everything about this man was frightening. Even his smile! It carried malice. All the bribe I could afford was a terrified smile back.

"Almost done," I assured him. He would have loved it if I had given him a coin or two to accompany my promise but where on earth was I supposed to get them? I was, as a matter of fact, raising money to go to the big city and see if I could make a living. I had to work in the farm for at least a good month to afford bus fare and to rent a room for at least two months when I get there. Mine was a well prearranged idea, at least so had I thought.

* * * * *

My mother had passed on a few months prior and my uncles had never thought I was supposed to be a living thing either. They were against my being ever since the day I was born. My mother was a Chewa and so was all her family. When she went to Masvingo for school, she met Hastings, a Nyawo who was to be my father.

"My daughter, you come from a pure Chewa tribe and we cannot allow you to marry a witch's son. Nyawos eat human flesh and we cannot allow a hyena in our flock!," my grandmother had refuted. I was then already in my mother's womb. They went ahead and married without her family's approval.

I was a product of a forced fumble and in most fairies destined for doom. True, it was. My father died in a car accident while I was learning to walk. My mother narrated this history every night and each time with tears cascading from her reddened eyes. First as history worth passing then a bedtime story that usually gave me passage to nightmares.

The breast she gave suck to me was equally cursed. She developed a tumour and a cancer that would eventually overtake her. She succumbed in death leaving behind her a curse; me. If Nyawos were indeed witches and wizards, their spells had been spelt correctly on me. Everything about me seemed to be painstakingly painful.

My uncles would have eaten in the same plate with a leper than have me in their homes. They saw danger and grim synonymous with my being. It was easier for them to cook for dogs than have me eat their leftovers. The son of doom, the Nyawo goblin, ndofa...all these were my pet names. My mother had told me to make lemonade if life keeps throwing lemons yet still I wish I had asked for the recipe. All she left was a note scribbled, 'At the farms you shall find your life'.

One summer morning, she set off for a firehood quest into the Nyala thick forest. What returned from there was bad news. A hunter brought the sad news that he heard a sharp loud scream then dead silence. He had courage to make attempts to figure out what had happened. He faced his horror. Mother's lifeless body was hopelessly on the ground. There was nothing within his means that could bring her back. By the time she was brought home in some traditionally made sepulchre, her whole countenance had changed. We only could identify her through her clothes.

She had to be buried the same day.

So long was my curse. Each day I would go and seat beside her grave, about five feet away from our two mud huts. I would listen to her whispers carried in the rushing winds. I would hear her sing for me songs she sang while I was a toddler on her laps. Sometimes she whispered ideas and invaluable advice. Sometimes I would learn from sad experience that it was my own mind playing tricks on me. I was only twelve and life seemed to stretch into eternities ahead of me.

What was my fate and destiny? A question I dreaded to answer. I had moments I would pray for death. I even dug my own grave, literally beside my mother's hoping to join her on the other side of the veil. I then realised death only comes to those who wish to live.

* * * * *

It was getting dark and Kizito was not amused. He reached for the walkie-talkie and enquired about the whereabouts of the farm tractor which was supposed to come and collect sacks of peanuts we had spent the whole day picking. The other end allowed me pity. The driver asked for an hour to arrive. 'That should be enough to finish' I told myself. One by one, my fellow labourers left and checked out with Kizito while I was obviously going to be the last. I also had to wait nonetheless for the tractor so it would ferry me to the farmhouse then walk the remaining five kilometres home. At least this notion gave me a little patience with my own self.

"Young man, " started Kizito unveiling his yellowish teeth, "this place is not for you." He reached closer and peeped directly into my eyes. "You should try the city" he ordered, " there are better opportunities for the weak there. At least you would have to use your mind than strength. Here we work hard, there they work smart ". He finally made sense to me! Little did he knew I had already outwitted him.

* * * * *

I found myself preparing for a seemingly insurmountable odd, taking off to the big city, Bulawayo.

I had no option. I had worked hard to raise the money and nothing was going to stop me. I tried to find clothes I could pack in my plastic shopping bag. I managed to pack my two t-shirts both acquired from the farm. Both were still strong and new and had a peanut message on them. I also took my Christmas pants I had been given two Christmases ago and my short mom had sewn from a flour bag. My flops needed a thorough wash first but they qualified after I brushed them by the river.

The eve of my departure was spent trying to learn city lingo and slang. I wished to fit in perfectly. Zodiac Radio station had good DJs for the job. I tried their ascent and for the good part I was impressed with my progress. I promised myself not to stare long at skyscrapers as this would be a sign of a newcomer.

Then somewhere among my mother's papers, I found letters I went through. Love letters between her and my dad. Some were still as new. There was one that stood out, written on pink paper. It looked relatively new and had a scent of perfume. It clearly was an old letter but was somewhat odd to be that fresh. I went through it like all others and was struck at the words that were as relevant to me as they would have been to them, 'soon we will be a family again.'

Were it not for the word 'again', my mind could have conjured up a belief that my mom had been in some affair I knew not of. Still, if these words were penned at the deathbed of my dad, how was he intending to have his family be with him soon? The pink paper might be from a hospital, I concluded. If he meant that life was too short therefore the use the of the word 'soon' was justified. But then, he was dying and the handwriting didn't show pain and agony of a man on his deathbed let alone, a bedridden accident victim destined for death. Could my mother's untimely death be part of father's final wish and prayer? If so, then certainly I was going to die soon because their family shouldn't be complete without me.

Curiosity led me to pack this particular letter in my bag. Was I destined for death? Only an affirmative answer would make sense. If both my parents died mysteriously then I was not an exception. I was to die and join my family. No wonder why life was a mess for me. This would explain why I was never the fortunate one and why my uncles thought I was cursed. If they were right, the Nyawos were bad a people and I began to see how my mother was considered naive. She thought education had opened her eyes but had brought her a curse. She should have listened...

* * * * *

My dad should have been a magician who left us under a spell, I reasoned, or at least his family is playing magical tricks. To me, it was possible. We had many superstitions we observed. It was possible for one to create lightening and strike an enemy. It was possible to steal a neighbours crops using a whirlwind and it was possible for the dead to decide fate of the living.

Our gods were that weak. It was all before sacrilege overtook sacredness. Before we had heads held high by education and emancipation. It was all possible and we loved it that way. Fear was essential, it kept us undaring. Answers were already there before questions could be asked and asking too much led to taboos.

Education destroyed our reasoning, changed our thinking and enslaved our creativity. Where we had more answers, education imposed a way not to be diverted from. A yardstick was canonized for our beliefs and anything outside the given proportions is termed ungodly. That's how education's emancipation enslaved us.

We found joy in supposing, knowing is boring. My mind was harrowed up in trying to figure out if the Nyawo, my dad, was simply encouraging his lover or he meant his words. It is very human to mean what we are not saying and to say what we don't mean.

* * * * *

Like a sheep going to slaughter, I found myself ready for an adventure that laid ahead of me. I gave my first ever prayer before I left my room. My lamp was very dim and darkness outside my little hut forced its way inside. I had to brave through to catch the only bus that ferried some to work early on a Monday morning to return on a Friday night. If I miss it, I would have to wait a week, I reminded myself.

There was a knock on the door and a silhouette of a giant man could be seen from the gaps of wood that made my door. A rumbling voice called me by name. It was a voice of which I was familiar with but shock had overtook calculative reasoning. Kizito! Came a spark of recollection.

There he was behind the door and behind him, total darkness.

"I came to escort you young man. You are too weak to brave this darkness alone." He had decided to play godfather. I wondered why he would be that caring and considerate. "I had to be tough on you at the farm so you wouldn't be too comfortable at the farm. Go on and find your

destiny in the city." He pulled out an oily khaki sealed envelope from his back pocket. In gestures, he instructed me to receive it. Whatever it was, I decided not to instantly open it.

* * * * *

Moments later I was approaching Bulawayo. I had been asleep for the bigger part of the journey from fatigue. How could I sleep? I had a mystery to solve on one hand and a fear for what lay ahead. There was something stiff in my pocket, yes it was the envelope Kizito gave me. It was perfect time to meet my surprise. Surprisingly, the surprise was not surprising. A 500 kwacha note, enough to buy a single plate of sadza, and a note written some house address. How I wished Kizito had given details about the package he had given me. I supposed he wanted me to use the money to get to the house whose address he had given.

I found myself in Bulawayo after a gruelling six hour travel from our village in Machingo.

The city was a buzz, reckless mini-bus drivers defied what I had read to be traffic rules. Market vendors added to the confusion by bringing live goats for slaughter at their stalls while flies sang a rhythmic buzzing song as they presumably did a window shopping spree from one stall to another. The vendors seemed to care less on ridding them. They were co-partners in creating confusion and pollution. An indomitable team!

I found my way to the terminus for Area 10 after asking for directions from three different individuals. They all pointed to the same direction so I was sure. I had to dash, jog and run as I crossed roads even at traffic light intersections where I was sure traffic is stationary. I found myself in an old and rusty mini-bus all my hope in the address I had been given.

"Here is your stop, young boy," the conductor yelled as the vehicle came to a halt. You can't believe what I saw as I jumped off the rusty! My mother was there, and the man she always told me was my father! I must have died along the road when I thought I was asleep! How on earth can I be with the dead if I am still alive?

* * * * *

The escape plan was well planned, Kizito was an uncle from father's side. He was the hunter who proclaimed my feigned mother's death. He watched me at the farm and facilitated my departure. I was surrounded by mystery and I didn't know it! We were a family again as the letter suggested and none of us was dead. The power of love is indeed stronger than the chords of death. The faked breast cancer escape plan was going to be slow so they had to create another episode.

If Nyawos are magicians, then there is no magic at all. The eye chooses to see what it wants to see.

DARK LIGHT

Brendon T. Kasiri

The city is wrapped in a blanket of darkness. The moon and the stars are hidden up above the pregnant clouds which are so big with rains, imposing a curfew on the city's inhabitants. Power cuts are just beginning to be noticed in high density suburbs. It is a good day to the armed robber and a bad one to the vagabond. The man in the streets blindly bypasses the bin and in normally most crowded places a thief bumps into another thief. The weather is very hot and people are either sitting inside their houses eating supper or are outside on their red floored verandas discussing about whatever has been going on during the day. It is a pity if mother has not reached home from work yet. Hope she will safely get there under the shadow of the thick darkness of this Friday night.

Looking from the street outside you can only see a golden candle light here and the white brightness of a solar lantern there, emanating from inside the dually built houses through the translucent curtains hanging on the front window rails. The light is however not big enough to thwart the

menacing night and so one can only see them because they have looked at the silent homes.

At the Kadyas' a small candle is lit inside the lounge-cum-dinning room. Its light is lame to prevail over the darkness shrouding the inner side of the house, a darkness so intense that it can be felt. It is not that the candle is too insignificant to give enough light to the room. The darkness is just unusual that it requires flood lights to swallow it. A thousand more candles would not help, not in the way expected. The same is with all homes. Light and darkness are coexisting, the deadly contest is in a stalemate. Night has come with it a violent pre-rain wind. It quickly enters through an open window blowing the burning candle off. Blackness reigns.

He has been feeling like wanting to read lately but the fuel light is not supportive, being intimidated by the dark darkness. Frustration hits him hard. Always behind, he feels: a book or two unread, three movies yet to be watched and a song he still needs to go and get from the pirate. Young and sharp, he is an intellectual graduate. As the clock is ticking he sees in every bits and chips the darkness gaining an upper hand all the more and all he does is wishing that the light unfold its hands to beat the stuffing out of the memorable darkness.

He hears a giggle over the wall from the neighbouring yard and gasps. It is strange even drunkards are home this hour. What a crazy evening, he laughs. It is funny than the jokes of the street clown. He is not in the mood for talk and that excites his thoughts. He strongly believes he had lied—and wonders how many people have done likewise—when he once told his mom that he was doing nothing. Nobody ever does nothing, he finally concluded. It is either you are doing some work in the garden, talking to a neighbour over the fence or sleeping on the sofa in the sitting room with a remote in the hand, almost falling. Apart from that, you are thinking. His mind gently takes him back hundreds of days before. He wishes he had stayed in that past forever or had carried its features to the present. The times are good to remember and sad to compare with the present reality.

Back then things had been different, not that he had everything he needed and half of what he wanted, but that he still had hope that all he was doing could take him somewhere desirable. In high school at St Ipito in the midst of the remote Yegego district of the eastern province where he had

met and mingled with friends from ranging backgrounds and felt life was pleasant; everything about life had been mobile and he had never felt numbness creeping into his voyage. His conscience tells him not to esteem the former days higher than the present, though his hollow mind, as he thinks it is, cannot construct a single meaningful sentence in defence of the later. He is everyday failing to do what he had thought he will do. Whether he is to blame or not he is not sure. The question is clear in his mind but the answer is vague. Maybe he is trying to understand what is not meant to be understood, or seeking for explanations for the inexplicable. He doubts if he should not know better than he already does. To him all that is clear beyond questioning is what dad says it was and what it apparently is. Everything else in between is misty.

Looking up the sky his eyes accidentally meet with a terrible bright flash of lightning cracking in the burdened clouds. Thunder follows some seconds later but he does not panic. He thinks there is nothing worse to what it is. It is embarrassing to realize that the only thing belonging to him that has worked so well is his name, Renny. The mattress is tired of safekeeping his valuables. All of a sudden something occurs which brings him back to reality.

The return of electricity calmed his fears and he quickly moved into the house to watch some films. His mind was tired and he no longer felt like reading. The DSTV subscription had long since expired placing the entertainment mandate solely on the dated black Phillips DVD with naked wires for a plug. He tried to play Hotel Rwanda but found the disc scratched. He softly pressed the open button on the remote control, moved towards the silver-grey glazed television stand and removed the corrupted CD from the holding tray. He then decided to play Game Of Thrones instead and hoped it will prove to be breathtaking like the Super Sports that he, just like his paw, would sometimes go to his friends' to watch. At least it could make the nerd that he was occupied in the company of others and think less. Unfortunately power went out again and this time he retired to bed. Another skip at reading, thanks it was a hobby and not an obligation from the squat lecturer.

He woke up early the following morning and the first thing he did was to bring his Galaxy Samsung to life. He was happy it had fully charged,

having spent the whole night plugged to power in case the electricity returned and he could not notice it. He was passionately against the idea of spending days rooted at home, endlessly fighting with his sisters.

"Hey, you! Can't you see you're stepping onto the shiny floor with your dirty feet? For God's sake someone got to leave in the morning for somewhere." His elder sister, Ayanda, would say.

"But I cleaned them on the mat before I entered." Renny would reply in a lowered voice to avoid any further harsh verbal exchange.

"Aren't you seeing that it's dry?" And so the battle would go on and on until the retreating Renny would be forced to say,

"And somebody else, too, needs to get married and move away."

At twenty five nearly all of Ayanda's friends and former classmates had been married and those in exclusion were having 'children without fathers', as the elders put it. Renny always prayed silently that his sister would soon get married because she was another source of trouble at home.

He switched on data on his smartphone and left it lying on the bed closer to the pillow his mother had bought from the peddler. Taking water from the buckets under the sink in the kitchen, he went straight for the unisex room he called toilet when pressure demanded it, and the bathroom when he felt the filthiness from the sweat making him uncomfortable, to take a nap. The geyser had stopped working when he was nine and the electric stove would increase the bill if they were to heat up bathing water on it. Tariff hikes were not a joke, his mother always emphasized. Cooking gas was expensive and the paraffin stove was rather too small to heat a good amount of water in the five-litre can. To make matters worse, they did not have access to firewood for two outstanding reasons: the firewood vendors could not make it to the centre of the village where their house was situated because of the sore municipal police patrols and the Environmental Management Agency's potential arrests, and that they had no rural home anywhere in the country from where to fetch the wood for themselves. The circumstances made Renny inevitably suffer colds throughout every winter.

Once he was done with bathing he put on his shorts and went back to his room. He applied some cheap lotion to moisturize his body and then

picked up a broken mirror from what looked like was once a dressing table. He carefully examined his exotic haircut and his face betrayed satisfaction. It was the most thing he cared about in his dressing. Last of all he neatly changed into a pair of black jeans, a white T-shirt with a navy blue collar and faint dark strips descending down from the armpits. He walked outside to the fowl run meant for broilers where the girls kept the mop on the roof, collected it and he returned to his room, his feet already looking reddish because of the excessively applied floor polish. He then cleaned his black high cut shoes on the bottom side of the sole, put them on and headed for the kitchen to prepare a cup of black coffee he was to drink with a couple of slices of bread left by his father on the previous evening when he was having his customary dessert.

After he finished refreshing he informed his sisters that he was leaving and then walked out in the morning chill prompted by the heavy rains of the previous night. He arrived at the congested dilapidating lay-by and waited for the minibus which was not going to take long before coming. Within a moment of his arrival four others joined him. Their dressings—which shared details of the buxom figure of the one with earphones plugged in playing Blank Space, and the slender angular bodies of the others—spoke volumes about their business as salesgirls in the city's average clubs. A Whatsapp call rang and he put his left hand into his pocket, causing the girl standing by to notice the fancy golden watch he wore on his wrist, and he stylishly fished the phone out, curious to know who that was. Realizing that it was his friend, Tino, he answered in happiness that it was not any of his network of lady friends.

"Hello bro'," answered Renny, his voice telling more about a life he wished to live than the life he was living.

"Morning chap. Tell me if you're still coming." Came the deep voice from the other end.

"I'm on my way to town," Renny replied apologetically thinking he may have been late.

"Ok fine. Make it fast." Tino said with no hint of whether he was really resenting his late coming or not.

"I got you. Thanks. I will soon be there and I would appreciate it if you become a little patient." Renny's words concluded the brief conversation.

A public minibus came and soon they were in town. He got out of the vehicle and moved at breakneck speed across the city's Central Business District, not minding the robots and the stream of cars in a cautious way as he would have normally done. It was not without a sigh that he entered Dirough Avenue to find it in silence exceeding that in the cemetery. Only the momentary barking of dogs from inside the walls topped with electric fences, unlike broken glass at Renny's side, made the only recognizable sound apart from the sounds from the birds which were pecked on the power line along the road. He reached the gate and rang into the main house so the owners would instruct the garden boy to come and escort him to the house, protecting him from the policing dogs to prevent them from tearing him apart. He entered Tino's room only to find him still locked in bed.

"I was actually thinking everyone was already here and you were almost leaving." Renny spoke, surprised at why Tino slept as if there was not anywhere to go.

"A crazy man's bornday gotta be a Fools Day." Tino laughed and then added, "Was just trying to make sure that everybody gathers here before he arrives. We wanna surprise him with an explosion."

"Good idea that is." Renny responded whilst sitting on the feet of the king sized bed and then continued, "How about the ladies?"

"They will join us there." Tino answered, with a hand on the mouse and his red eyes focused on the laptop ahead of him. "There is a one I'm looking for. Can't find it. I'm sure you never watched it. Exactly your genre. Switch on that desktop and search for 'Bitten'. It's a series and so entertaining."

"Is the switch turned on?" Asked Renny when he saw that the monitor was not responding.

"I'm not sure. You may check it out." Tino responded with his usual cheerfulness. "So tell me who's coming."

"I told Fi to come. She is just waiting for me to tell her where. It's good that Muggie is away. She is at school. Tiacara isn't in the country and the rest I don't mind. And you?"

Tino started laughing before saying, "You know the queen. Madam boss."

"Theo?"

"Yes, Theo."

"I thought you meant Jennifer."

He laughed again and then said, "You're crazy. You remind me of what happened."

"But there was a time I almost thought you were going to marry her." Renny said.

"Shit happens. Haven't you found it?" Tino answered, feigning a smile.

"I got it. Let me play it, episode one."

"Good. I'll leave you watching that one whilst I visit the shower." By these words Tino closed the laptop and immediately left the room.

They were old friends indeed. They shared all secrets in the same way as they had shared their knowledge and the dormitories, and the social differences had not amounted to anything. No later than the movie had begun that three others came in. One of them had his car parked outside and the other two had been dropped by a taxi. They exchanged brotherly greetings affectionately, exchanged handshake and rubbed shoulders in a replay of the mannerisms practised by the elite. Another reunion. It was all joking and laughter while they waited for the one they had gathered for that weekend, and in a way distracting Renny's concentration on the interesting movie.

Tino finished bathing and looked at his body into the two metres long mirror fixed into the wall. He returned to his room with his body rapped around by a large dry towel. On his dressing table were all kinds of manly lotions, perfumes and other expensive cosmetics whose names were either

German or French. When he opened an orange bottle on the table its contents sent a sweet fragrance throughout the room. He combed his Afro-hair to perfection. Finally done with a gentleman's make up, he put on a white outfit and a pair of white sneakers. He then looked into the mirror on his dressing table and nodded to the grand dressing he had branded himself with.

To Tino weekends meant partying. What else special could he do on days off work except to enjoy responsibly? After all he had all the basics he needed: a beautiful house in the medium density suburbs of Megrn park, a silver Mercedes parked in the indoor parking lot on the ground and a thriving bank account; still unmarried, spending days at home was only for the olds.

Soon after Tino had finished dressing Koby banged the half closed door open, happy that it was yet another reunion with his friends with whom he used to practise student pranks. The maid—barely over nineteen—heard the noises coming from the fourth bedroom and wished she were part of the occasion. It was followed by a discordant singing of the orthodox 'Happy Birthday'. In no time Koby had found himself creamy all over and they later gave him a new towel and Tino led him to the bathroom. He came back to find a nice outfit awaiting him, having been bought collaboratively by his friends as a token of appreciation for his twenty fourth birthday. They congratulated him for having grown a moustache and joked that each was going to give him a lady for a present.

They had breakfast in the dining room before taking off. There were all kinds of fragile utensils predominantly glass, all of which were executively designed. After some minutes the meal was over and they left everything as it were for the maid to take care of. Tino took the gate remote control, slid it into his front pocket and went out ahead of his retinue of friends. They decided to drive in pairs, the one with a car and the other without.

The mini convoy sped down the avenue and stopped at the robots where Rien and Second Street intersect, sending a swishing sound of tyres having friction with the tarmac as brakes were heavily applied. The robots turned green and Tino, who was driving ahead with Renny on his side pressed the accelerator pedal hard, unleashing the Benz from the spot. In the middle was a fancy BMW and a Toyota Premio cruised behind. Soon

they were out of the city, heading for Kakuru lodge where they were going to meet a number of blondes.

The party kicked off with another amplified singing of 'Happy Birthday', ladies doing most of the shouting. This time there was not any spoiling of the smartly dressed Koby. Everything was already in place, tables well ornate with purple, light blue and white colours; bottles of Two Keys, Coca Cola and London gin, comfortably sat on the decorated table, gracing the occasion. Koby was made to sit on its head. The atmosphere was enchanting and everybody was hilarious. It went without saying that it was delightful to be away from the prying eyes of the elderly on such a drinking frolic.

Presents were given before the part could move out of the thatched shade into open space. A braai stand was already smoking, waiting for the sausages, beef, chicken and pork in the insulation boxes filled with ice, sitting by the tables. Drinking and dance began and the broadcasters could have seen it all had they flown their drones to the scene. They danced in pairs from House to Hip-hop, the kind of music which magnified the event. Renny found drinking for the first time in his gay career a little bit challenging. He had been used to mild forms of inducing merriment but however thought it still did not hurt to give it a go just for a single day. Much with his uncle's philosophy that drinking cured stress, he had all the reasons the world can ever hatch to place the glass to his mouth. A single day would not make him a dipsomaniac, he thought. He was just being happy like everybody else.

His uncle whom he only heard of from his parents had long since left the country for the diaspora. They said it was for a reason he would say especially when drunk that life in the capital was kicking at his ass and he was pissed off. His vocabulary was very rich in derogatory words he found easier to say on his way from the discothèque around 2 a.m. Soon after accomplishing his studies in chemical engineering he left for Germany and that was the last time they heard from him.

His uncle's articulate lecture on drinking he only received as a second hand story made him spare the brakes when the moment would have made him a misfit. They all drank on behalf of their ancestors until their throats burned with liquor. Girls were excessively drunk that the dudes had to carry

them back to the taxes and give drivers fake addresses, probably those of distant relatives. Whatever the consequences were to be faced in daytime. Renny, too, was not an exclusion. He showed his friends hell as he spilled the vomit in the car on their way back.

Sean and Koby were no longer capable of driving even though they knew that the police at roadblocks had finished their duties for the day. Koby contacted his younger brother and Sean called his cousin to come and get the cars home whilst they rolled away with Tino's who was half drunk and half sober. They were content with the fact that none of their ladies was going back to their parents' with all the recklessness they had fumbled into. Good lies were to be invented on the morrow to explain their failure to turn up home for the night. That was life of a third class female citizen in a third world. They imbibed multiple joys when an opportune moment came because it seldom happened.

"So we gonna drop this nigga first at the location before we drive to the avenues." That was Tino informing his friends how he intended to drive following the map in his head.

"Before we drive to the strip club for a hook up before sleep." Koby spoke, spilling the spittle on the back of the front passenger seat.

"His old man won't like it, I'm sure. He doesn't know this black Yankee has taken to drinking." Sean said, his speech clearly slurred.

"Don't speak as if he does it more often. He's still a novice. Bloody first timer." Tino tried to correct Sean in the spirit of comradeship. "The old man ain't home," he continued, "He told me in the morning that the they have travelled to see their in-laws. Family stuff."

"Well, fine. Hope those bitches he calls sisters won't report him." Koby put in again. He was reputed for speaking less when sober and quite the opposite when drunk.

"He's no longer a boy." Makiy spoke for the first time since they had left the lodge.

There was laughter in the car and then Sean said, "I thought you had slept already chap. Boys like you have already wet the bed twice."

"It's still too early for sharks like me man. I feel like watching 'til morning. Where can we find some yellow bornes? I need a one night stand." The incessant Makiy was on the cue.

"That alone will kill Koby and you soon. See Pavlo and Renny are gone already. Join these spoiled brats and dream of your damn fantasies." Sean answered.

"Leave him alone poor boy. He let the girls go without a tumble. I'll drop him here if he keeps saying that." Tino spoke from the driver's seat.

The conversation continued until they safely got to the Kadyas' by nine in the evening. They picked Renny from the car and carefully laid him on his bed. Tino left a short goodbye note on his phone before leaving. None of Renny's sisters woke up but Ayanda heard to her amazement the talking and staggering of the drunken men as they helped her brother through the unlocked doors.

Morning came as it always did and Renny woke up from sleep with his shoes on, surprised how he had come home. He felt the hangover killing. It was annoying much because he had not been used to it. Albeit nothing had changed. His bed was still littered with books one of which revealed some grotesque Biblical images of the first man and woman. The only thing he was sure he had profited was a passing feeling of drowsiness. He was caught up between refraining and then face reality squarely or indulge in alcohol all the more to maintain that state of fantasy.

He checked the calendar on his phone only to realize that it had been two days past the deadline. The same thing had happened for the seventh time in a row. The company had promised to respond within a week of working days had he qualified for the receptionist position which was in the offing. He remembered his mistake and wondered if it really was a mistake.

It had been on a Tuesday of the week before that all roads had led to the A & E Corporations. Nobody had tipped him to avoid making a lengthy résumé with skills and academic qualifications exceeding those of the human resources manager. A holder of a Bachelors in Accounting, he had been dismayed at why the loquacious HR still remained a private having worked for the same company for over thirty years, as he had said in his

address. Had he known the trick he would have been glad to hide his prestigious degree, his colourful Advanced level certificate and even change half a dozen 'A's on his Ordinary level certificate into 'C's if need be, so long as it was possible.

His interview had not been erroneous, that he correctly remembered. He had been fluent and eloquent as usual. As for the requisite skills he had mastered them for years. Sitting on the edge of the bed he contemplated his failure to secure that prized opportunity given the enviable credentials he had to his name. It was all summed up in a question of great concern, a question he could not answer.

With his friend Tino it had been much more easier. One of his cousins was a Chief Executive Officer in an insurance company. He had found the job without undergoing all the normal formalities demanded by the rubrics. He had refused to go to university soon after high school saying he needed to save a little money and sort out some issues before proceeding to the citadels of higher learning. All that existed in his tethered mind were a drama or two by Shakespeare and a poem from Chaucer, a little about Ahab and Jezebel and something before and after 1789, the knowledge which was not suited for an economical position he was granted. The tasks required professional expertise and the branch manager found him wet at his job. The boss had well manipulated the fabric of the company and the manager found it difficult to go against an instruction from him so long as he was not ready to forfeit his job. He was sure he did not want to join the hoards of job seekers or return to the rural to move around hunting for the cheap home brewed beer and have his children chasing after goats. So he let it be.

Just like the uncle he had never seen, Renny was fade up. It was not working. His intellectual capacity promised a brighter future which remained shrouded in obscurity. He felt for a thousand more like him who were no different to the village cowboys. There was no longer a chasm to differentiate black and white. Everything everywhere was blackness. The abuses inverted the norms. Lights were darkened. The money he had used in travelling looking for employment could have bought him another pair of shoes. He had incurred loss. He felt the situation repressive and it made him reticent. He was beginning drinking lately or at least had tasted and he found that exasperating. Drinking or no drinking it was all the same. He

was just another passenger on a ship bound for nowhere, the cabin crew with all hands on deck skilfully directing the sail.

It was his younger sister, Sehli, who brought him to reality when she called him for breakfast.

"I've been calling for so long and you've been ignoring me." She said, her voice bumpy, apparently agitated.

"Sorry I wasn't hearing." Renny apologized and then yawned.

"You're lying." She protested, shrugging her shoulders.

It was just that she feared to be given a whack on her head, were it not so she would have said instead 'And you expect me to believe that?'—a question she almost asked. Renny made his way into the lounge for tea. His appetites were a million miles away. He tried to take a single bite at the margarine spread bread and swallowed a sip from the mug. He closed his food, muttered something about eating later and left for his room. His siblings exchanged knowing glances and the eldest said,

"That's the way it is," and everyone except Renny laughed.

If Renny could not be applauded for not owning a car like some of his friends then he surely should be appraised for his avid reading in his collection of repertoires, an art he learned from Tino who always reprimanded him for his emotional attachment to the calculator when they were still at school. He kept a small library in his room composed chiefly of novels authored by Charles Dickens and Eric Blair, among others. His extensive reading of objective material was an indication of refusing to be docile.

Tired in body and mind he closed the door to his room and walked haggardly towards the book shelf in such a way like a doomed soldier after battle, traipsing in thick mud. He felt too weak to borrow a book from the library and sat down in despair. He found himself remembering everything from the tyres he used to push in the blurring past and the family mimicking games he used to enjoy where if the girl from across the road volunteered to be the mother he was sure to declare himself the father. Whatever it was he could not finger point with certainty but he was sure it

always gave him sickening anxiety. Every day he ate without sweat, he enjoyed partying without having to part with a penny and he dressed smartly, the good work of the money he did not know how it came about. Yet, withal, he was still disturbed.

The Sunday was a boredom. The idea of waiting until nine p.m. so he would go to the bar to watch some classical games was not inspiring. He tried to find something to occupy his mind as sleep refused to play the ransom. He then remembered a fable shared by grandma years ago when she still walked on her fours. It was about a family of monkeys, baboons and a hare staying beside Chego mountain. The hare was naturally the mastermind and so he bestowed the privilege of not going out to search for food as an honour upon himself. He was the first one to be served during meals and he ate until he was convinced he was full. When the rest were away stealing maize and pumpkins from the fields at night when humans were asleep, he sneakily took some of the food in stock and hide it under a big rock so that he will have something to eat where they to return with nothing.

He made a wry smile at the cleverness of the hare. How he missed granny. It used to be such a pleasure to have her around telling folktales and lots of stories about back then. Back then when I was still a girl we did not have hair softening chemicals and so we used red hot metals. Back then we had no face powder, ponds did the job. Back then before you were born your father met your mother when he was working in a steel production factory. He preferred to think that life gave granny up and not the other way round.

He was just about to call Tino so they would drive to the new houses to see a girl they had met in the supermarket who had said she resided there, when he thought about the meeting with Emilia on the Friday of the previous week. They had met at the Digest cafeteria at the outskirts of his location's township. He had found her standing by the counter waiting to be served. The menu he requested for caught her attention as it made up the amount she would budget for food for two whole weeks. She initially thought he was just trying to be posh but was surprised to see him proceeding with the order. It was more than expensive in her eyes and for her pocket. After exchanging greetings he learned that she was called

Emmie for Emilia. He thought it well sounded with Renny and for the first time he did not lie his name. He added his change to her order without showing affection and asked if she did not mind to sit with them over the meal since she was alone. Fortunately she did not mind.

He was not reluctant to introduce her to Tino whose name had already changed to Thiago. That was how he did it with his talisman, the biggest player in this game for two. Renny quickly spoke about the business they needed to conduct in town before Tino's speech could reveal otherwise. They well cooperated in their mind games. It was a culture which made Renny less introvert. The meal was over and the three of them walked out. Renny gently escorted Emmie to the car as he had told him she wanted to go to town afterwards. He opened the doors to the back seats and went inside to sit with her. Tino went to his usual place to play with the wheel and the stick whilst the two did have their time in his interior rear view mirror. They agreed to go out in the middle of the week that followed. They exchanged contact details and before leaving, she invited him to church for Sunday and said that would be when she would have decided the actual day having consulted with her busy schedule. The guys dropped her at FB Bank and veered off. It was enough for the day and each had to retire home for rest. Tino was just ending his off and would need to slowly start some preparations for work on the coming Monday.

There was need for him to attend church service that Sunday morning to see her and especially to show her that he was faithful. He speculated on the idea of losing the jackpot and found walking to the chapel worthwhile. There was honey in the hive and he was ready to endure the sting of bees as he had done with the rest. Later in the morning he walked to the chapel and joined the worshippers an hour after the service had commenced and sat on the back row where she could not see him. The last words of the preacher were the only thing which knocked sense into his absent mind.

His father understood the widely felt fiasco and seemed to be confirming without saying it especially when half sitting and half sleeping on the sofa listening to Taxman playing in the background, a replacement of the old school Country music with Reggae, that he was willing to keep sponsoring his education now that he eked out his pension with truck driving, the enthusiasm coming much from his ages old dogma that

education was the backbone of life. The prospect of enriching his curriculum vitae was more than appreciable on face value but deep inside he felt that the aftermath did not justify the years. It appeared like throwing precious time down the drain. It was a shame.

Renny never imagined himself getting married anytime in the near future until he would become a man of means. Marriage was totally out of question. Presently he was confronted with three fundamental options he thought would decide his future: to further his education not minding the years which will never be compensated for, enjoy his stay eating off his parents' pensions, or start a small scale entrepreneurship by the roadside. He was to drop some habits as the man of cloak had admonished and move on.

That morning he struggled with devising excuses to send her explaining why he was not going to make it as per planned. Glad that the DS had been subscribed, he switched on the thirty two inch plasma television, his thirsty eyes greatly expectant. What he saw was startling, however promising to support the first of his choices. He saw the namesake of Uncle Sam in action. Joy overwhelmed him as he imagined what was unfolding and understood the unsaid. He had only heard it from his paw and hopefully he was going to see it for himself. He prayerfully hoped that it was not an ending of a catastrophe and the beginning of a tragedy.

* * * * *

A DEFFERED DREAM

Kelvin Mangwende

Old Mukandi threw his inward looking eyes to the horizon; he wiped the sweat from his rubicund face. The snowing and freezing of Murewa winter made him numb; much sweat was welling on his hairy armpits, he had travelled ten kilometres distance, now he was heading to his village. ‘Another vain year again of drought, so what is the meaning of us voting again? We shall vote for joblessness no food and unfulfilled promises, we shall bear the brunt of truncheons. The rich are getting richer and the poor poorer; they are happy to live like monarchical whilst we are in the mud of poverty, the scenario they created for us’.

He thought and whispered to himself a grizzled bachelor; he gurgled his maheu that he had given at the star rally. He had spend the rest of the day in the chilling weather chanting slogans, but you could see Mukandi’s eyes among the many people his facial expressions denoted a dejected human being. The mantra that is always spoken at the rally “all shall be well” had brought much unbearable pain to marginalized people. Old Mukandi had

feared for his life if he had not appeared at the rally, and he was not alone in this panic mode. Most people were sequestered against their will.

Mukandi had unceremoniously left the rally when it was still in progress with his patched trousers and grumbling empty belly. You could see his sandals which were made of car tyres were too heavy for him when he spent the rest of whole day on an empty stomach. They were cracks on his feet sometimes they oozed blood because he could not afford to buy Vaseline. He had travelled an endless, hopeless journey to make ends meet; he had attended each and every rally, but the promised dreams were deferred. Mukandi was always in paranoia and absurdity when he goes to his unfruitful land; his few crops had wilted under a blazing sky; on top of freezing chill of winter that had stunted the crops. He could see and feel the frost laying thick on the infertile land. He always hoped to become a master farmer, but here was a master farmer without a tractor or fertilizer, he only had visible scars on his face; scars of war, the scars of the bullets. Each time when he looked at his land with sunken eyes and gaunt face he could see monstrous ants eating into his shrivelled crops; his eyes were wet and shone with heavy tears. The deciduous trees leaves in his field pour off making unflinching birds make their nest.

The Senator-to-be had promised people bumper harvest and 50kg fertilizer bags but to date it seemed there was to be harvest of thorns. The dampness of the dew of hope that had fallen early in the morning that he would be given fertilizer at the rally had vanished in the thick sodden air. "Does the Senator think we are dim witted?" he thought to himself. Old Mukandi his previous years he worked on a white man's farm as a tractor driver; but only to escape with a punitive package. When the land was redistributed to marginalized people Mukandi and other people were thrown into a jovial mood; however they were later to find deferred dreams encircled in poverty. There were goose and bumps down people's spines, little drizzle always soaked their crops.

Mukandi memories of his two late sons ebbed again in his itching mind. They just disappeared and only later to be found on the raging infested crocodile river; they were manacled, what was their crime the youthful sons had committed? It remains a mystery even today the village people couldn't solve the death puzzle. Drizzle dispelled winter-dust on dilapidated

tombstones, now and then the time Mukandi visited his son's grave, he had buried the corpse in the far end of the field. There was a broken cross that had withered with age, the blurry memories of his beloved sons lived him without answers. His eyes were shone with much heavy tears and his torn apart heart winced in unbearable pain. "The land redistribution has become a self aggrandizement venture, it is a political affiliation".

Mukandi was in deep thought. People's houses were burnt and white farmers were driven away from their farms. The black empowerment programme was fast creeping in, the land needed to be distributed equally. The drought and poverty had found its self among the defenceless people; village boys were rummaging overflowing dustbins at market places. They were scrapping food scraps like scavengers, they had degrees, diplomas, masters, but they were now village boys; murderers, tsotsi's, prostitutes, village whores. They now spend their time in shebeens roaming in the scorching sun; other youths were harassing elders, they killed their beasts when the senator addressed them at the rally. The senator had promised them free education, electricity, tarred roads, fertilisers; but to date the bridges had been washed away by swift currents of the river. People were fetching water with plastic buckets from infested crocodile river to water their shrivelled crops.

It was now a decade the quarry stones heaped like a molehill on the other side of gravel road, few of them had left, jobless youth had vandalized state property. Old Mukandi raised his dusty eyes he saw an unflinching bird perching at the poster of the Senator stuck on a gum tree; it was written below, "VOTE FOR DEVELOPMENT, JOBS, LAND AND MORE FOOD." He looked down with tired eyes as a swirl of mist hugs the rainless ground.

CLASS LOVE EXPOSED

Reynold Sibanda

The first thing he noticed as he entered the classroom was that all was not well. The tell tale signs were everywhere, the air was charged with tension, a tension so thick it hung heavily in the air as tangible as a whore's perfume. Being the type of student that he was, Kuda couldn't miss this. The stolen glances from the classmates, the stifled giggles, and the hush that had suddenly descended when he had entered was all that he needed to know that something was up. He tried to figure out what exactly the problem was as he walked up to the desk he occupied in the furthest corner of the class, the number one back bencher.

The eyes that followed him to his place were quickly averted the moment he looked in their general direction and there was no questioning why, for he knew the reason well, they all feared him. Even though he was much into weight lifting, his peers knew that he was also a natural born fighter.

Typical of him he only carried two books to school for all the subjects he did and everyone knew they were the only ones he ever had, that all his notes if he ever wrote anything were compressed in that book in a minute, almost microscopic handwriting most of which could actually pass for hieroglyphics. Many wondered how he could actually read that and to those who were bold enough to ask him, the answer was always the same, a stern glare that sent them away always. To everyone the boy was clearly anti social.

Kuda was a short, thickset boy of seventeen at Dangamvura High School, a reputable sportsman with a bulging chest that he carried around thrust out like a pigeon. He was not only the best at chess and football but also the best athlete. He was dark in complexion with dirty tobacco stained teeth on the verge of collapse and having few friends, he had apparently chosen a scowl as his permanent expression in life, a feature that added the fear of him from his peers.

A first glance at him, the way he dressed and everything one could see him for the drug pedlar that he was, the naughty backbencher and sometimes bully, only a few could actually tell that beneath the veneer of naughtiness, coldness and savageness lay one of the most intelligent students to ever walk the roads of Mutare. Whether this intelligent was born of the weed he smoked regularly, or natural intelligence, or even hard work, none could actually tell. What many could tell on sight was that Kuda was a reserved someone who had actually retreated from the outside social circles to a social circle of his own that existed only deep in his mind. He did not know it but the boy was trapped in his anti social being and turned more to drugs for solace.

As he sat down on his desk, Kuda's eyes swivelled around the room like a chameleon's, to try and find the source of discomfort in the class but he could find none. The teacher wasn't in. The weed in his head that he had smoked on his way calmed him down, there was nothing worse than death that could actually befall him in this class, he thought to himself, plus even if it were to come to him, death always comes as the end to everyone else. With these thoughts he sat himself comfortably, opened one of those books of his, and buried his head in it, whether he was reading or not, none of the students could tell. The other students kept stealing glances at him but he

didn't seem to mind any more, and if he did, then he did a good job in concealing it.

The opening of the door and the burst of activity as a procession entered took the attention of the whole class. Leading the group was Mrs Tango their class teacher, then came the headmaster, the third was a bulky man Kuda hadn't met but it was the last person to enter who made his stomach churn and his hair stand on end, Angela. To Kuda the air in the classroom became suddenly still and the room felt small and cramped. He began to sweat profusely from all pores on his body as he studied the unknown man suddenly dreading to accept the identity of the man that his mind was trying to whisper to him. Impulsively he loosened his necktie that he felt was beginning to choke him.

Even as he studied the unknown man, he felt the more than forty pairs of eyes of fellow students looking at him.

So these other students had known, he thought to himself.

The man was bulky, the kind of bulkiness that was more of obesity, with folds in his neck like a huge black pig such that the head was reduced in size to something small and not in proportion with the rest of the body. He had eyes rimmed with red like a ferret's and he walked with hands open, the way boxers and bouncers do. The clothes he wore were shapeless and tottered as he walked, a human scarecrow.

When they came to stand in front of the class, Angela couldn't look up, she kept glancing at the floor.

'Is Kuda in now?' Mrs Tango spoke to the class as if she hadn't seen the boy. It seemed she too was afraid of the unknown man.

No one in the class answered, for no one wanted to be the Judas of the class for all were afraid of the moment of reckoning that might follow, when Kuda will be judging the perpetrator accordingly.

On his own accord, without waiting for the Judas kiss, Kuda stood up, sweat streaming out of his armpits despite the bold face he showed to the class.

‘Come over here, Angela’s father wants to have a word with you,’ the headmaster said.

Kuda shuffled clumsily up to the front and came to stand a metre or so away from the man, beyond reach if the man decided to swing his hand at Kuda.

The man regarded Kuda with an angry face, his red eyes narrowing until they became two slits burning with a fire so fierce, Kuda shuddered. On the other hand Kuda being a boy of pride held the glare, chest thrust out and chin up, arrogantly. The class became suddenly charged with excitement, even the headmaster felt the years dissipate one by one till his youthful days were upon him. Suddenly in this classroom two savages faced each other, each a paragon of its kind. For a moment the headmaster was tempted to let them fight but he knew the consequences and he moved in between them.

The man took out a small paper and Kuda recognised the letter he had written to Angela the previous day.

‘Stay away from my daughter,’ he was frothing at the mouth furiously, ‘Otherwise the consequences are better left unsaid.’

With those words he turned on his heel and left. The headmaster wobbled out after him like the faithful shadow. Kuda looked pitifully at Angela, unsure of the fate that awaited her at home as they both went to sit down. That was when the teacher read the letter to the whole class:

Dearest Angela

It’s been a year since we started dating and I am happy that we have kept it secret for so long. As we approach our final exams I think it is time we get to spend more and more time together or even you coming to sleep over because each time I think of you I become more and more lonely. We can still spend more time together without letting a lot of people know that we love each other. Anyway good day to you and take care.

Yours lover boy

Kudex.

When he finished, no one laughed as she had expected. It still couldn't sink in that Angela, the church Usher, Angela the quiet one, the most envied girl could actually date Kuda, the boy who existed in a world twice removed from hers but who knows, such is life, the destiny of the world was written by scribes long since perished, besides who cares, love is blind. But still one way or the other, this was a lousy way to get a class love exposed...but who cares.

THE KNOTTINESS

Ambitious B. Tavengwa

The November sky seemed to be so promising but the sun fought hard to take charge of the atmosphere. The rain maker stood at the village square, looking at the promising sky as the clouds disappeared and knew that the ancestors were very angry. Noon was fast fading, as dusk's orange colour decorated the sky and it was very beautiful. The herds of cattle were grazing for the last time before they could start chewing the cud that same night. The boys had already assembled at the cattle kraal to play their favourite game, soccer but the ball man was not within visibility.

There was massive jubilation as the ball man approached. Medzai! Medzai! Kick the ball said a young lad, whom I later learnt was nicknamed Mukandi because he could score goals. Medzai did not hesitate to kick the ball up into the air and there was a fierce race as the group of boys like a swarm of bees fighting to protect their hive, ran for the ball and a cloud of dust could be seen. The dust that rose had no relationship to soccer, you could only trace its roots to traditional dance. They could neither see nor

breathe but you could only hear their voices, some coughing like tuberculosis patients and some wailing in pain. “Wandikuvadza, wandikuvadza”, said Mukandi as he limped out of the cloud of dust looking all whitish except for his right foot which looked tomato red.

The wound was so noticeable, a young girl who was passing by saw Mukandi bleeding and tears started creating a water like fall that ran down her cheeks. In a soft voice the young girl spoke, and we all saw a smile brightening Mukandi's sad face. “Women always make men smile even in the tightest of situations,” said a young lad who looked like a literature enthusiast. He didn't want me to notice that he was the one whose tongue had spoken wisdom so he brought the novel close to his face. I could safely conclude that he was not confident or my gaze of admiration made him feel so shy. “Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet,” I whispered turning my face to see the opposite direction.

The girl sat on a small rock, her face told a very sad story and she did not know what to do. The only action she took was to try and touch the wounded leg but Mukandi's reaction was that of someone who had seen a ghost. No! No! Mukandi shouted in a cracking voice and we could all feel the pain.

“Are you hurt...?”

Before she could say more words Mukandi was already nodding his head, smiling to try and make the girl grin. We later on heard the herald of their relationship from Newsday the village informer, I didn't even bother to ask why he had that nickname. His character spoke volumes about his nickname. He had finer information about everyone in the village ranging from what they had ate the night before, who was pregnant to mention but a few. To be honest he had nothing else to do than to whirlwind around people's homes.

The boys could not continue with their plan, you could see that their day had turned into horrible nightmare. Guess who had to speak again, the boy holding the novel, what sense did he speak this time? “Misi haifanane, days are not the same” repeating the very same verdict in order to stress a point as he walked towards a Muzhanje tree. The novel was in his back pocket this time.

The girl seemed to have been more worried than the boy as she sat swimming in painful thoughts. “Have never seen her smiling said Newsday. “Her problems are way too much, even the whole village cannot manage to solve them,” I became very curious and I remembered that my uncle had always cautioned me about wanting to know more. Newsday was not the kind of a person who would start a story and end it before it finishes even with food in his mouth. “She is dying very soon, she has cancer and she cannot afford the treatment,” I felt my heart heavy, could easily relate to her situation to my aunt who died of the same disease. Mukandi promised to marry the girl despite the situation, he continued but this time whispering because he didn’t want Mukandi’s friend who had moved closer to us, to hear what we were talking about.

* * * * *

Mukandi asked the girl to lift him up, she wiped her tears, tried to pull him with her left hand but she failed and fell into Mukandi’s spider web like hands. We all failed to understand if the move was staged or coincidental. She felt a great tide of emotions as his hands squeezed her buttocks. He could feel her heart fluctuating as if she had finished an energetic Olympic race. Forgetting that they were people s, you could see their lips moving up and down slowly and I concluded those were scenes in a romantic movie that would make parents retire their children to bed.

Meanwhile the boys stood admiring the two as they kissed passionately. Some were holding their private parts as they felt the snake growing fat and angry to spit some thick fluid which looks like mushroom sauce. Time up, hamusi mu bedroom said Mai Chisamba. After hearing the name Mai Chisamba you would think they were referring to a lady but after a close analysis I realised it was because there was not even a second that would pass without seeing his cheddar cheese like teeth. He was the kind of person who had every reply for any question and had plenty of the stories to entertain people. They had missed the Colgate so much and at that stage only a dentist would work the magic to whiten his teeth again. People would always complain about the ugly breath that would always put their sense of smell to the test. Believe me his breath would invite an army of those big green flies affectionately known as green bombers. The boys

would use Mai Chisamba and the stinky skunk interchangeably when calling him.

All of a sudden there was gross silence as a fine lady who looked to be in her mid-30 approaching, she wasn't smiling at all and the sound of her gumboot made me scared. What could be wrong I asked Newsday? For the first time since I had known him, I had never heard him stammering, "Sssshee, ssssssh", he couldn't finish. The woman was known for shouting and scolding people who would cross her path. "Nhasi unondiona mwana wa Francis, wakajaidzwa," she was hurriedly walking towards me, pushed me to pave way and grabbed Newsday by the collar. Newsday was already trembling, he knew that his gossips had landed him in hot soup. The woman was hurt by the fact that Newsday was parading a rumour about a chronic disease she was sad to be spreading and that her daughter's days were numbered.

We didn't see how Newsday touched the ground but it was one of those moves we used to see on Television and admire them. We all stood confused and at the same time scared to say anything. Even the most talkative can be this silenced said to myself as I looked at Mai Chisamba who was also said to have fall victim to the woman's beatings. "Be careful about what you say to people, my daughter is not going to die", she said this as she vivaciously turned, and walked towards the direction of her home. We were all scared that she could see her daughter and Mukandi would find himself being escorted to the hospital but lucky was on his side she never looked towards his direction.

Mukandi was up already, holding his girlfriend's hand and she was melting like ice exposed to the sun. "Lucky him, it's good to be in love, love is a beautiful thing. It knows no boundaries, imagine dating a grave", shouted Newsday. The words did not sit down well on Mukandi's chest who got very angry and could not speak. I will beat you up son of a harlot. They say your father was barren but you came into existence, go ask your mother who your real father is? Bastards will never respect because they didn't receive teachings of uprightness from their fathers. It was too late for Newsday to let words come to his defence. He ran like a maniac and in the opposite direction was Mukandi limping and his girlfriend trying to stop him. "Fighting won't solve anything, I am going to die that's the truth. We

can run away from the truth but facts are facts and as stubborn as they are, they are hurting me but I don't want you to fight."

Mukandi could was in a furious rage and not even an army battalion could stop him. Have you ever seen angry bulls fighting? We all failed to understand if anger could make people behave like animals. Newsday proved to be man enough, we all thought the fight was a must win for Mukandi judging from physical appearance but his face was all swollen, he became the beast who was fighting to protect his trap queen. In the midst of the fight Newsday's necklace fell. They were tired, it was another lesson learnt fighting doesn't always produce the expected results. Newsday and Mukandi fought, they did not achieve anything instead they inflicted pain on themselves.

Mukandi stood looking at the necklace that Newsday had dropped and looked at his." This necklace looks exactly like mine", he said this with a face that looked very confused. "Where did you get this necklace", asked Mukandi as he quickly removed his, only to discover that the necklaces were of the same design. "My mother gave me the necklace, she said it was a gift from my father", replied Newsday as he was bending down to pick up his necklace.

Mukandi then recalled sitting with his father, the day he was given the necklace. His father had told him to always wear the necklace because he would meet his elder brother one day wearing a necklace of the same make. You know when you are young something's can really sound like a joke. "Does it mean that Newsday is my brother? The reality really sounded like one big joke from a stand-up comedian. He suppressed the smile that was about to surface on his face, stared at Newsday hoping to observe some similarities, the nose looked like his and his foot looked like his father's. "Look at this necklace said Mukandi as he threw his necklace to Newsday".

We all stood there trying to understand what was going on. There are those moments when you try to understand what is going on but you are far from even understanding. Newsday threw back the necklace to Mukandi, "they look alike so what does it mean", he replied frowning. "Who is your Father, answer me." My father is in the grave, you want to bring back memories of the good man replied Newsday and his eyes failing to hold the sour water that had formed in his eyes and overpowering his eye

lids. We all heard the drum beat from the Chiefs house and we all were supposed to make sure that all our cattle were safe and we were supposed to be at the Chiefs quarters every Friday.

The suspense of not hearing how the Newsday and Mukandi story had ended was too much for my curiosity to handle. I saw all the people dispersing and I remained a statue didn't want to be disturbed, I wanted to know the whole story, and I wanted to know why the boys had necklaces of the same artistry. My curiosity was shot by the arrow called left hanging, Mukandi instead of letting out the whole story, he commanded Newsday to ask her mother as to whom his real father was? It disturbed me, have you ever tried to kiss someone and she seems to be responding then all of a sudden you hear footsteps of someone approaching, that's exactly how I felt. I wished if I was the time keeper so that I would stop the time and let Mukandi talk even more. Every story should have an ending especially when the beginning is so promising. The village had people who would camouflage their deeds by taking cover of the darkness. It was so obvious that the similar necklaces had more to do with the secret activities of the night.

We all dashed to clean up and brace for the great story teller who always entertained us every Friday night and later on play some music just for us to exhibit our dancing skills. Each Friday was always different from the other and we were looking forward to having fun. We would always sit and first of all shook hands as we were going into the Sabbath a traditional belief of the Mudhungwe people that you should not get into the Sabbath without saying sorry to someone you wronged during the course of the week. We all set, anxiously waiting to hear the food of the ear that the great man had prepared for us. Even the most talkative would keep quiet because the old man was known to be fun. He would take the whole week researching and compiling the story.

Once upon a time in a small village there was a man called Madwidwi, he was very poor and he lived a pit house. The only inheritance he had was a special black jacket he got from his Father Dwamu. One day a family of rats was passing through his house as they were headed to the water hole, a female pregnant mother rat fell and failed to find her way out. All efforts to rescue her were fruitless. She had to find a place to hide before Madwidwi

was back. She jumped into Madwidwi's special jacket and hid there. Days blended into weeks and she gave birth.

The mother rat survived with the food from the poor man's table and managed to feed her family. One day the Chief called for a meeting at his quarters, Madwidwi was one of the poor man who would always wear his special jacket at every village function and walk like a millionaire stepping out of his Ferrari. The meeting started and Madwidwi was sitting at a place where everyone would notice him. As he was sitting a young woman kept on pointing at Madwidwi. Madwidwi was surprised because the woman would laugh every time she looked at Madwidwi's special jacket. The sun rays were not sympathising with Madwidwi's right side jacket pocket, you all know that black absorbs heat so it was very unusual for the baby rats who had spent most of their time in the pit house. They would raise their heads up resulting in the woman noticing the movement.

For a man who knew how special his jacket was, Madwidwi thought that the woman had fallen in love with his jacket but he was all wrong the woman was laughing at the breed of rats that the pocket was carrying. Women are women so they generally cant laugh alone in such incidents, they alert other women. There is always the kind of women who don't respect even important proceedings. One of the women shouted, "Mbeu yemakonzoz mubhachi".

The chief looked at the woman and she looked back at the chief with an eye that said sorry a thousand times. Before the chief had started talking again, Madwidwi tried to fork out something from his pocket and brought out the army of grey soldiers. This disturbed the whole procession, a village drunkard Masese kutapira stood up and started laughing and shouting out loud, "mabhachi anenge akatakura hawo aya". Everyone laughed. Masese Kutapira continued, "Haa isusu tisina mabhachi tinonzi hatisi varume, hevo varume vane mbeu dzemakonzoz mumabhachi." We all laughed even more, then some girl pointed at my jacket and said, "Jacket rine mbeu yemakonzoz." It's good to make people laugh in the name of being the so called entertainer but will the people sympathise when you when the person is taking action against you. My blood pressure shot, the action that followed after was an unseen of a matador trying to protect himself from an angry bull.

Managing my anger was one of the few matters I had to learn, the scenes I had created after that silly joke about my jacket was not worth all the words I threw at her. Everyone at the gathering stood, mute maybe they never thought I would disrespect a lady at some point in time. The most enjoyable Friday had turned out to be a dramatic night. They say the power of words is so hard to take back and forever torturing. There was nothing else I could do than to swallow my pride and fall on my knees. A sorry cannot be that meaningful but once said it lessens the depth of the words you have spoken. Everyone was surprised but the great man said, "To be man is to know when to say you are sorry and how to say sorry". The action taken afterwards by the wronged one doesn't matter, when you are sorry expect two things to be accepted or to be scolded he continued. Never will you in your life add more or hold personals with your fellow friends and relatives. Why would you hold a personal grudge with a brother, imagine if God holds personals against us would we have ever lived to see tomorrow.

The old man continued with the story, "And so the people chased the rats but they did not catch them. Some hid in the gumboots that were removed because of their disturbing feel when sitting. The meeting finished and people had to wear their gumboots. "Maiwee maiwee ndarumwa nembeu", he couldn't finished as he was stung again. Masese Kutapira was one guy who would laugh at you and you would think of committing suicide, I then looked at Medzai relating to what was being said with the old man and I broke into an endless laughter that was because when a story is being narrated you can easily relate to the characters you live with every day. Masese laughed and laughed until the person who was bitten wanted to beat him. "Vamwe vachafunga makonzo izvo zvirizvikwambo", he said as he lifted his bottle up to quench his thirst for beer and sooth his throat which was already complaining of being dry. Madwidwi looked at him with the eye of mad cobra that is ready to attack after a fierce battle with a cat. We all clapped, thanking the old man for his time.

Before he finished the radio was already making my eardrums dance, the sound of the music would wake me up even when I was dead sleeping. It was not just music to me, I had a better understanding of appeasing myself when I was stressed. Apparently I had looked for Newsday and Mukandi but they were nowhere to be found. I asked myself what urgent situation

would make the two miss this Friday night. Before I even finished we had the voice of a crying woman and we all looked towards that direction, it was Newsday mother in the front and Newsday was behind shouting out loud, “I want you to tell your infidelity in front of everyone”.

They said Newsday didn’t have patience when dealing with people but in this case it was very difficult because it was his mother involved. Newsday’s face was stupid with anger and any act of disrespecting him would have made any man big or small be dealt with. For all this year’s I have lived visiting the wrong grave ,submitting my plea to the person I lived to call my father only to realise that the blood that runs in my vein is of royalty.. Royalty everyone repeated the words in a manner that only a music choir master would understand.

It was time for Newsday's mother to spill the paraffin and lit it with a matchstick. She began narrating her story, it is very difficult for a woman to live without a child, and you all know that being barren in these patriarchal societies is a prison sentence on its own. It all began after years of marriage with my late husband, my being pregnant was way too long and overdue. We all wanted a baby and one day I decided to go to find out what was wrong. The village Sangoma told me that my husband was potent, so I had to save my marriage at all cost because I had learnt that the family elders were planning on looking for another woman who would give their son a child. The village tradition always blamed a woman’s for not bearing a child everyone knew that. A woman who was found naked in the grave yard would be treated better than a barren woman.

It was one fine November afternoon when I was at the river washing my husband’s clothes, I remember hearing a song that I had always wished my husband would sing for me one day. The way the song was being projected, it was being sang with mastery art, he could even compete with the composer, it was one melody that would make you be in heaven, dine with the angels and come back my heart sank deep because of the voice. The voice was the devil that made me fall before the man even had a word with me. When he came I was naked before he even removed my clothes, I was already adulterating with him in what seemed to be a visionary meditation of a depressed cuckoldry.

It was sex at its highest level and maybe that’s why when I met the man

it was easy. I had sank deep in love with a man in a vision. We all had thought that the story was a myth but the woman was giving testimony. Everyone knew that the man was always mentioned for his sexual manipulation. He was said to be a man who knew roots to make them ladies fall in love with him. He could make love to any woman in the village. She continued when he came the adulterous act became my regular hobby I would call him every time I felt that I needed to feel the manhood in a man, he was good and I enjoyed his company then he gave me this sunshine here today, Newsday, Mandipa.

He brought me the joy of being called a mother but it's so unfortunate my son here learnt about his father in a wrong way, I was supposed to have told him whose real father was, maybe he could have had a chat with his real father before he died. Some things are better kept as secrets than to be known. It's a shameful act, I don't deny but we all go can stretch to the edge of the limit in order to save our marriages'. I am a victim of circumstance. Newsday it's time to know your people, Mukandi is your brother and your father is now late but he was next in line to the throne. The blood that runs in your blood is of great importance, if you don't go to your people learn their ways when the people need you, you won't be able to lead them.

She made her hands carry her whole body as she rose from the dust. After such encounters it was always difficult to look at the people, will you stand the shame of being embarrassed, what was her next step? Life was going to be hell for Newsday's mother because if you here people laughing when you passing by you will think you are the victim

If you were Newsday would you have joined your people after being a village informer who was always gossiping and speak ill about your people? What would have happened to the cancer girl? Would Mukandi forgive Newsday after he learn that he was his brother? Even if he had accepted and promised to live with his brother at peace, the relations between the woman of his dreams and his brother were far from being good. So many things in this world will change, the once bigger rock will become a very small one, sometimes not even visible but it will still serve its purpose. Brother if you are to know the woman I married you will realise that some coincidences in life will reflect destiny. The very same woman I scolded is

my wife today. God performed another miracle in Mukandi's life, his wife is still alive and they have a beautiful one big family. Newsday is our chief he has married all the kind of women and divorced because of gossips. What you do will always find your footsteps and follow you. The events of the black Friday unfolded in a manner that showed that everything happens for a reason

HOSTILE LOVE

Major Destruction

Considering all the sacrifices and commitment, Simon did strive hard to attain his trophy of perseverance, my doubtless conclusion can only be phrased, “Death to the harlot, Martha”. Despite the misdoings of Martha, some of the blame I will let it rub in Major’s face because, frankly, he should have known better and be the wiser because what he now represented, to all those with close relations to this triangle, was hostile love.

It was all wrong write from the start, or even way before the start. Patience and Martha, half-sisters, same father, different mothers but one could not distinguish the dynamic if they did not have knowledge about it, the latter’s mother was deceased and they lived with the former’s mother but as one happy family with no show of differences. However, of the father, he has been ensnared by the perilous pursuit of this world’s unending sweet smelling but deadly proverbial flowers. He was not coming back, at least not anytime soon. To set this adventure in motion, along

came Simon, he had his eyes fixed on Patience and hoped to set things in motion by sending his love gospel messenger to the damsel, but something went wrong, horribly wrong.

On arriving at the residence, the message was conveyed to the rightful precise destination, or so the messenger thought. Left me shift your attention to some background information a bit. These two girls looked very much alike in body build, complexion, voice tone and pretty much everything else that if you did not look closely you would mistake them for identical twins. This is where everything was set on a derailment course. Due to the lack of this knowledge by the messenger, the message was delivered to Martha, but as they say, beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder and Simon's eyes were quicker than his words and in no time he realised the dreadful mistake. However the kind of damage done was already irreversible so he had to stick to his story and gradually taught himself to love Martha in the stead of Patience.

While the veiling of one thing leads to the unveiling of another, it was self-destructive for Simon to think that such a girl, the definition of beauty would get to twenty-something without a lover. Little did he know that he was sharing his flower with Marshal. Just like the rest of the populace, Prudence became a mere spectator in a game she was supposed to be the front runner of. She was in a long-running relationship with her John and their relationship was the typical 'gonyera pamwe' and that is why she was never bothered by Martha taking her 'man'.

Having a considerable income, Simon did not waste any time in deciding to make Martha his for life, outshining all the vulture-ly gold diggers of the local ghetto, Marshal included, depriving them the chance to vandalise yet another wall flower. Simon came and paid the greater percentage of his lobola after making the necessary protocol-based arrangements. He was to come later to finish off his balance and leave with his newly begotten wife but that only occurred in what was probably one of his sweetest dreams.

Regardless of his demonstration of unwavering commitment to his wife to be, Martha did not bother terminating her relationship with Marshal. As a cross border truck driver, he had limited time to see his someone's-wife-to-be girlfriend, so when he came back from one of his south Africa trips and received the devastating news, he had to take immediate action. The

both agreed, for reasons only known to them and maybe the bewildering spirit that possessed them, agreed to get intimate and made sure Martha got pregnant. In no time she took a pregnancy test and sure enough, Marshal's child was beginning to form in her womb while at the same time she was still married to Simon. Would this bring peace to her, what about Simon, and of her step mother who considered her as the very fruit of her own womb? The devastation!

For Martha it was an easy issue, she was quick to pack a few of her belongings and left for Marshal's parents' home, which is just next door. For Simon, however, what had happened had happened, but he could not let his investment go to waste, all he wanted from the 'wife thief' was his money. With Martha's mother, it was an entirely different case, she was left breathless, nearly got terminally ill because of the shock. These two long time lovers became the unavailable laughing stocks of the entire ghetto, a story drunkards used to accompany beer down their throats at the local shebeen, a children's toy story while playing house, but worst of all, it brought unwarranted shame to our beloved church.

As the ghetto scribe, my wonder is, will this house built upon hostility against love last the test of fidelity and commitment to eventually bear fruits? Simon was blessed to find a replacement quick enough, luckily.

NOT MY FAULT

Natasha L. Karimakwenda

I sat there in the Psychologist's chair, failing to take big breathes without having to push the tears back. 'I am a strong woman', I would always tell myself, 'no one needs to see me cry, not even President Ncube's psychologist. I work too hard to be exposed'. Running to be the Vice President in the biggest bank in the country was any woman's dream, but everyone now was in the race, even Paul. The politics of the workplace became my biggest nightmare towards my biggest dream.

'Paul...'the psychologist began, 'Tell me more about Paul...' I am still failing to take deep breathes through my nose, to try and calm myself, so I decide to distract myself by playing with my trim navy blue skirt, it hits me that the pain was much bigger than getting the job. 'Vice President Khumalo...'she caught me deep in thought, I was too distracted, and I begin to freeze, to the point that the tears finally make it out, even as I fail to blink them out, "Vice President Khumalo, I know you probably think that not showing your emotions is going to protect you, your position and

everything you do, but President Ncube sent you here because he knows something is wrong.' I didn't care; the tears began to pour out. Time stood still for me that day, with all the memories and all the shame attached to it, but nonetheless, I had to gather myself for progress' sake. 'Do you believe with the girl her body, her right should be protected so that she doesn't feel violated?'

'Yes Vice President, I do'.

'Her body, her right, she felt violated...that is what happened to me...' I turn around on the chair and I begin to let everything out. I knew the longer I stayed there, the more I would think and rethink about the incident, 'Paul and I were best friends. We entered the bank as tellers five years ago. I knew when he was dating and he knew when I was dating', I smiled at the good times we shared as tellers, 'we used to make jokes, give dating advice, share lunch when one of us was broke. We were just friends. More like brother and sister. He got married, and I didn't...which is typical of a power woman's life, that didn't really matter, because I had my dream job...'

'So you really trusted Paul' I looked at her like I had been exposed, 'yes I did. I found no reason to not trust him, we were workmates and we worked well together. When promotion came, we separated into our separate offices, with him leaving first. He was always the one who was a charismatic guy, and who would deal with things with a joke or two. He's great at pitching ideas and getting buy-in. I on the other hand believed in proper financial strategy. The typical charts and numbers girl.' I was calming down. And I thought to myself that despite what Paul did to me, we had very good times together, like we were brother and sister.

'So when did the trouble start?' I paused, and started to feel guilty that maybe I trusted the wrong guy, that maybe I shouldn't have let him in my office that day, or maybe that I shouldn't have lied to President Ncube 'Um...on the way up the building with each promotion, Paul started getting obsessed with his job. His love for his job was equivalent to mine, but he had more responsibility with Lauretta and Ntombi....his wife and daughter. The higher he climbed up the building, the more arguments he had with Lauretta. At one time, I got a disturbing phone call from Lauretta accusing me for keeping him at work, but I had always encouraged him to go home

to his family. Things got really bad. His marriage depleted, and when that happened, he buried himself in his work. He stopped being that fun, light charismatic man I knew who sat at Teller 4's desk, and when he did pitches, he was never himself. Then the big promotion was upon us, being Vice President. From the moment we set foot in the bank, we had admired 17th floor, and I wondered how it would feel like looking out my window, everyday, to a city that entrusted me to make the right decisions when it came to their money in our bank.'

'This job is more than just money for you.' She asked 'oh yes, I like to make an Impact to make people learn.' I began to cry,' but how can I do that when Paul violated me like that.' She came around to comfort me, 'there, there, Vice President', 'I hate that title,' I continued to cry, 'Paul wanted this job, he needed it, but it was given to me,' the tears I cried that day were the tears I had locked back for weeks. The Psychologist was cupping my head as I thought of how Paul came in drunk in my 17th floor office.

He came in at about 7.30pm on a Tuesday night. As usual, I was looking over reports and getting ready for the big presentation for our investors. He fell on the floor of my office and I ran for him. When I picked him up, he touched my face. For the first time, Paul would never accept my no. I found myself being challenged by a Paul who was enraged with anger. He whispered to me that I was a whore, that I slept my way to the 17th floor. Later on, I found myself physically trying to get Paul to stop touching me, even as he called me a whore. Enraged Paul turned to violent Paul; he was grabbing my neck as he began removing my underwear. I could barely breathe, let alone scream for someone to come and help me.

Eventually, I told the Psychologist everything. 'The reason why I now hate the 17th floor is that it turned my best friend to my rapist. Even after days of calling in sick, I cannot contain myself as I walk in. The incident keeps repeating itself in my head.'

'Who else knows?' she asked, 'No one, I cannot get him fired. Where will he go?'

THE BRIDGE?

Blessing R. Makunde

Looking puzzled, nothing to gaze at, head spinning with the troubles of life and just hoping everyone is going through the same phase. The mind of my life changing was but just a dream. As a young adult living in the rural setting of Chihota, life was tough and rough for me and my family. Just after completing my Ordinary Level, my father was brutally attacked and killed by a group of thugs. Since then poverty struck my family, it was our normal way of life. Being a fatherless child, living with my poor mother and two siblings, every dawn would make us crack our heads thinking what we were going to eat that day. Fruitless promises were made by close relatives and friends even the community at large. Our God was ever faithful we survived besides the hardships. Besides having passed my Ordinary Level with flying colours, I was mocked and none seemed to have a heart to help me proceed with my education. I was just like all the village girls who did not attend school. Thank the Lord they were married. Our own relatives had distanced us because we were not well up. We were labelled as inferiors, failures in life. All I wanted was an honest answer from God.

What had I done to deserve such treatment from my own relatives?

One Friday afternoon the headman, Mr Ngwena called for a gathering at his homestead. People were urged to attend the meeting with a sense of urgency. My mother prepared and went to attend the urgent meeting. The headman told the congregants that everyone must gather at Mwenje Growth Point the following day for a convention. The convention was said to have been scheduled for the previous week but postponed to a later day due to communication breakdown between the visitor and the responsible authority. Ululations were heard after this announcement and then the congregants dispersed.

On Saturday I woke up in the wee hours of the morning to do my usual house chores. After completing my chores I took a bath as my mother was preparing the meal for the day. I wore my old beautiful floral dress which was neatly ironed. Well, my mom had prepared mangai and the traditional opaque (maheu). She gave me a cup of maheu and a handful of mangai just for me to survive. This was the meal for the whole day. My mother encouraged me to attend the announced convention as she thought maybe it was a food aid program. At first I did not want to go but I trusted my mother and I thought the same I had to go.

The sun was very hot as it was mid-October so I opted to use my mother's hat so as to prevent my face from the burning sun. It was quite a long distance from my homestead to the designated meeting point. Walking alone in the dusty road of Bunjira Village under the scorching sun was not easy. All I could hear were birds singing, water flowing peacefully in Shiri River and leaves falling in the dusty road. Different thoughts were in my head and I would smile as I imagine a good life with my parents in another world but as soon as I knew these were all imaginations I would ask God the same question, "why?" It took me approximately two hours to arrive at my destination.

I was very tired, I started walking slowly, and suddenly something took my eyes. I was attracted by the luxurious cars which welcomed me. A large crowd was joyously singing and dancing harmoniously to their songs and all that could be seen was a cloud of dust. I decided to join them as I did not know what to do or where to go. Suddenly someone touched my shoulder and said "Chipu, is this you". My heart began to pump very fast I did not

know who was behind me because personally I was not well known in the village. As I turned around to see who this person was, she hugged me so tight. Fear was all over me I wanted to cry but I could not. She looked at me and said “Chipo you have changed dear.” My face lightened up, she had completely changed I remembered her face vividly. She was an old classmate “Rudo the naughty girl.” I was thrilled to see her after such a long time.

During our conversation it came to light that Rudo was now a lawyer at a local law firm. Her friend and partner Cheryl was married to a prominent businessman and they had come to assist the vulnerable in the village with food aid. My heart was filled with joy as this meant the end of poverty for a while at home. Suddenly, an announcement was made people were asked to get in the hall and be seated. Rudo invited me to sit next to her.

People were addressed by local business personnel. The delegation team was introduced and a thunderous clap was heard from the crowd. All was left for the guest to talk to the people. Mr Manyene, a simple man born and bred in Chihota gave a brief background of himself. He gave a short and precise speech then moved to his co-business of the day. During the previous season rainfall had not fallen as it normally does. Manyene had come to help the community with food stuffs, mbeu and the basic needs. Ululations, song, dance and continuous thunderous claps were clearly heard from all the corners of the hall. I failed to contain my joy thus I stood up and joined the crowd in singing and dancing.

Little did I know that Manyene was deprived of his own educational need. As a way of giving back, he felt that there are some people who were suffering the same fate hence he was willing to help the less privileged with their educational necessities. At this juncture he asked all those who had at least five Ordinary passes to stand up and join him. Rudo whispered and told me to go as this was a life time opportunity a blessing in disguise. Numbness filled my body, my heart pumping very fast I stood up and with confidence walked to the podium. We were only ten people and I was the only female. He then announced that he was going to cater for all our educational needs until the attainment and achievement of our academic goals. Tear drops navigated down the contours of my face as my prayers were finally answered. My dream to become a pharmacist was not shattered

at all. This was the beginning of a new life, a new journey, a journey to success. Manyene was the bridge of my life; no one could describe how happy I was.

As I turned back, Rudo and Mrs Manyene were behind me and they gave me comforting hugs and I thanked them. Blood was flowing at a rapid speed I was no longer stable all I want was to run home and share the good news with my poor mother. After the distribution of the stuffs Manyene had brought, Rudo and her friends offered to escort me home. With the joy I had, I never realized that we were home yet. Rudo was the one who was giving directions. The moment I set my eyes on my mother I started to cry, I quickly opened the car door and ran straight into her arms. She failed to control her tears too and she was also crying. I told her what had happened and the good news she was short of words. She cried uncontrollably and thanked the Manyenes.

We took all the donated stuff into the house as well as our visitors. Rudo did all the introductions and officially she told my mum the good news she had. My mum was speechless all she could say was, "Thank you very much my children. May the dear Lord be with you now and forever. May he bless you abundantly. Thank you, thank you!" She repeated the statement endlessly she was very happy.

Rudo and the Manyenes had come at the right time to rescue me. My life was pregnant with sorrow I never thought that I could proceed with my education. All I thought were shattered dreams and hopes thus a hopeless life. Without assistance I could not have made it. Truly, Mr Manyene gave me hope, he gave the bridge of a life time. He made me realize that obstacles do not mean the end of life. One way or the other God definitely answers our prayers.

I am proud to say I am now a qualified certified pharmacist working in the capital. My mother and my two siblings are now enjoying the comfort of the Sunshine City which we never dreamt of. It was a hard experience with amazing outcomes which I can say "it was from rags to riches". In everything I do I always thank God for remembering me through the Manyenes. They have a special place in my heart, their love and kindness made me who I am today. Thanks to the Manyenes!

FIND ME MR. RIGHT!

Prince Gwezuva

The mid-morning sunshine sneaked through the window and teased her light skin. The fresh breeze swept down below the flower garden and burst through the open windows to her room. The simple smell and freshness brought a smile onto her dimpled face. Her phone vibrated, she swiftly calibrated her attention to the blinking screen and left the comfort of her bed to stop the 9am alarm.

Tendai walked towards the window to indulge her senses into the natural smells, the ringing bells and the sun to which she owed the morning smile. She took three deep breaths and relaxed for a short while, at the same time she could feel the fresh air seep through her lungs refreshing her mind and awakening her soul. She got a sort of enigmatic energy popping right in after observing this daily ritual. It took her about thirty minutes to clean herself up and lastly, check for e-mails on her phone. Her sister Rufaro was already up in the kitchen feeding her little baby and making breakfast.

Tendai came to the kitchen room dancing, her smoothly carved body covered up in a black suit. The testimonial quotes of women having being, “built” found way to Rufaro’s mind when she saw Liz coming in. Tendai was one of those women whose physique was attractive and well kept. Rufaro deeply appreciated her younger sister’s joy and surprised her with her favourite breakfast, toast bread with a cheese omelette. Tendai’s phone rang, she quickly left the kitchen and flew towards her room. It was after twenty minutes of silence that Rufaro followed her. She lay on the floor, tears rolling smoothly and slowly across her beautiful face.

“What’s wrong Tendai, are you alright?” Rufaro wept

No response came from her sister and she pulled Tendai’s weak body up on the bed. The so much beautiful smile had suddenly been eroded off the surface of her face. Her face looked horrid as a murderer’s dream, it had swollen up within the short period of time she had been absent. Her hands were shaking and she could not open her eyes. After a moment or two, as if she had been struck by lightning, Tendai rolled up and about before letting out a scream that startled little Tom and her sister.

“Great! This is just so perfect! What is wrong with me? He has broken up with me...”

These words came like a brazing torch to Rufaro who was seated on the bed, trying to keep her younger sister calm. The soft fresh breeze that had been flowing through the window was now burning her nostrils and the sun... it seemed as if it was lighting up her whole body with anger. Tendai felt weak but at the same time, so powerful like a time-bomb about to explode. A message in her phone read,

“Try so hard to forgive me but we were never meant to be. There’s no more US! Don’t call me or send me messages...Taurai”

Who was Taurai anyway? Just some guy she had met not so long ago. Was the type of man who always had her laughing; he was charming, intelligent and above all... handsome. In her diary’s first page she had made a checklist for her potential boyfriend. A lot of demands blackened the little pages and he met only half of her demands in a gentleman. She, Tendai, was fully Christian and believed in divinely ordained love. Most of the

young women in her church were either wearing engagement rings or holding babies and that alone pained her poor soul. What had she not that other women her age possessed? Was it a mesmerising body? A well-paying job so as not to burden her future husband? Well... she had all the above but most of all, she always was the best.

Her sister Rufaro always put the blame on her job and that it scared men away. At times even Tendai blamed herself for having a determined and fully devotional mind on her job. She worked nights and hence spent more time in her office than paying attention to her marital status. The two had met as representatives of different companies at an all-financial advisory workshop in town. Her creativity and strong character when she pitched her presentation got Taurai all wound up and ready to ask her out on a date. She gave in to his proposal and several dates worked a little magic between the two.

The message alone raped her, considering the plain and harsh language that he had used, her mind went through the memories she had with him and she suddenly bolted out of the room,

“He does not even fit on my checklist`s demands!” she wept

A force of raging energy was now flowing in her veins, controlling her every move. Why had she put up with him all along if he was not perfect? Why had she not left him long ago when he asked her out on a date? Compromise... that was her weakness, she thought she saw a gentle loving man out of him, not the stiff-necked bastard whom she now imagined of him. She had taken a challenge that would bring her down.

Rufaro followed through the passage to the doorway where Tendai stood, hands holding her waist, mind pondering on what she was to do next. She recalled the first day he came to her house, innocently holding nice smelling roses just for her. Then Rufaro held her hands and with the soft motherly touch Tendai felt calmed, this was Rufaro`s therapy whenever such happened ever since they lost their parents in a car crash. She hugged her little sister and shushed her the way she always did with Tom.

“You fell in love with him and there was nothing wrong with that...” she whispered,

“He is the fool for ever letting a woman like you out of his life”

It was as if after the speech that Tendai fell into a deep sleep only to wake up in a small and nicely lit room. Her eyes hurt a bit when she looked into the fluorescent lights above; she felt weak and could not make a sound when she saw numerous pipes connected to her hands. To her surprise, she was wearing the hospital dress and felt uncomfortable being surrounded by beeping machines and alone in a surgery room. She found herself confused and not ready to give in to reality. Still, she could not pick up the pieces and recall what had befallen her.

Rufaro was in the waiting room with Tom in her warm hands when some nurses asked for her presence in the surgery room. She was struck with fear when she saw Tendai lying helpless on the hospital bed. The only memory that was triggered by this sight was the last time she had seen her parents, blood stains everywhere, in pain and weak. Moreover it was the same hospital where their parents had died. The grisly sight made Rufaro weep from the inside, knowing she was the pillar of strength to Tendai, whom after noticing her made an attempt to lift her hands but rather proved in vain.

Rufaro moved in trying so hard to conquer her tears and subdue them under her command but emotions failed her. Strips of tears broke through her firm silky skin and gathered up below her cheeks. From deep inside she harnessed courage and looked her sister in the eyes, the lively spark that always shone off Tendai's eyes had dimmed. Rufaro felt a cold chill down her spine and felt as if death lay beside her sister, waiting to pounce on her the moment she left the bed.

“She's going to be alright”, one of the nurses who were injecting Tendai echoed. When Rufaro leaned upon the walls banging her arms against the floor she wept,

“This is your fault Taurai! It's your fault!”

She spoke as if the floor were Taurai, stood up and trampled upon the innocent floor once again.

The mentioning of the name Taurai came like a jumpstarting spark to a car battery low on voltage, Tendai could clearly put up the pictures. She lastly remembered... a trail of blood following her in the passageway, Rufaro`s loud scream then wailing sirens. She remembered watching her sister`s hands holding hers tightly, face streaming with tears as if it were a waterfall. She had blacked out on the way to the hospital and here she was.

The doctor came in and comforted the two sisters and then abruptly shot into the results analysis taking Rufaro out of the room,

“She had a miscarriage... I am so sorry, but she`s going to be well soon”

Rufaro suddenly covered up her eyes,

“She was pregnant? I never noticed that doctor; could it be... is it? How old was the pre...”

Before she finished her statement, a nurse chirped in,

“Doctor Ignace, hurry up! The patient... she needs your attention!”

“I have to go see your sister, see how she is coping with the treatment for now”, he said, dashing into the surgery room where Tendai lay. The cold feeling of death had swarmed Rufaro`s mind thus shattering the glass of her hopes. Calling Taurai to witness her younger sister in pain was useless and it would not lessen the pain in any way but she had to do it. It took a few minutes before the gentleman dropped in the hospital. He looked horrified and sweat poured from beneath his forehead making him all wet. He held his face up high gasping for air as if he had taken lengths of holding it in.

His formerly exquisite taste in being a “classic man” had suddenly faded away within a short period of time after receiving the call. Taurai made large strides towards the waiting room and found Rufaro waiting for him. Rufaro found it hard to look Taurai in the eyes and in an ecstatic frenzy; she gathered herself up and punched him right in the left eye. Taurai staggered a little but the pain and blindness brought by the punch made him trip and fall. He knew he deserved more than this but his body knew less and wasn’t prepared for the next fists and kicks that poured on his whole body.

If it wasn't for the hospital security that came and held Rufaro, Taurai would have lost a set of his teeth. Hunger pains pinched Rufaro from inside her stomach and within seconds she was out of the movie character. She felt weak, as she always was, she could feel the pain on her right hand caused by the hard impacts with the masculine. Anger had overpowered her and taken control of her actions but now she was out of power and the hard grip of the security tightened on her hands made her look vulnerable.

"This is not a fighting ring Ma'am sort your disputes out of the hospital"

After taking a sigh Taurai groaned,

"It's alright officers; I can take care of this"

The scary look on Rufaro's face had died away and the thought of her sister lying in the surgery room frightened her. What even tortured her most was the presence of blood on her hands which reminded her of her sister's blood before they came to the hospital. Of course Taurai was strong but being brought down by a woman was an embarrassment, he had been taken by surprise by the fist of an angry woman. The two then walked slowly towards the elevator, Rufaro was now worried about her baby Tom whom she had left since morning in the car of hospital authorities since he was not allowed in the surgery room.

On the sixth floor, a lot of commotion could be noted and the movement died in the surgery room. Doctor Ignace stood a few feet from the entrance, caught up in what seemingly was meditating. The arrival of Rufaro and Taurai startled the doctor who after noticing the two knocked out of his second soul and headed right into the room. Nurses came and escorted the two to the doctor's office where they impatiently waited for the busy man. Curiosity pulsed in their minds while at the same time they hoped for the worst. Rufaro, knowing the depth of the condition crept in the corner and wept silently.

Taurai could feel Rufaro's tears strolling down her cheeks, their intensity like an earth-moving machine over a castle of glass. He alone felt like crying but could not find reason. From the corner came a soft voice that stroke through Taurai's heart almost leaving him in tears,

“She was in love with you...the doctor said she lost her baby...”

Rufaro stood head up high as if she were paying her last respects to a legend and continued’

“Did you really love my sister?”

The time to be manly had passed, Taurai burst in tears like a little kid. He let go of the tears he had been holding in from the time he had received the news. The first blessing he had been granted, he had thrown away. This baby who was to fill his life with reason, dead and never having the time to hold. The moment that followed pictured Doctor Ignace briefing Rufaro and Taurai in the office,

“I’m afraid she might not make it, she lost a lot of blood and the medication we gave her is not helping as we thought it would...”

Taurai cut in immediately,

“What do you mean she might not make it? Huh?”

As he angrily flushed the emotional mixture from his mind, the doctor made an attempt to walk out of the room. Taurai was in no mood to be left hung up, he needed answers,

“Is she going to live or what?”

His big arms locked around Dr Ignace's neck who gasped for air and fell to the ground after being released. Rufaro shrieked from the corner and suddenly wept,

“So this is your solution? Beating up the man who can save her? You’re not what I thought you were!”

A few hospital staff came and helped the doctor up. The night was still young by then, Taurai was dismissed from the premises, the security feared his violent reaction. Rufaro took her baby home late and cleaned the blood-stained floor. Tendai, who was now put in the intensive care unit, was well taken care of by one nurse named Sindiso during the night. When Rufaro came through on the phone the next morning, Tendai requested a pen and her diary.

Taurai made visits daily for the next weeks until the day Tendai was discharged from the hospital. The doctor had stated the cause of her miscarriage to have been hypertension and high blood pressure. She did not talk much to anyone although she seemed to be recovering; her pen and diary were the closest friends she always kept beside her. Rufaro never had the urge to open the diary even when it was left at her watch during her bath-times. She only saw Tendai smiling when she held Tom or watched him playing. After at least three days of the release from the hospital care, Tendai sent an invitation to Taurai for dinner at her house.

It looked as much more of a celebration to recovery and none of the two, Rufaro and Taurai made an attempt to bring about the topic about Tendai's miscarriage. Their conversation flowed swiftly until at a moment when they were about to finish eating. Teary-eyed with contemptuous beauty flowing on her face, Tendai confessed how she had felt for Taurai, how he had made her believe in love without conditions. The radiant glow that showed off her face, pure and dignified, coloured the picture of a grieving mother. The look on her face compounded by the natural extracts dismissed the fact that she had been in a hospital bed a few days ago.

Outside, the moon shone brightly onto the surface of the earth making a beautiful view of the world outside. Dark clouds pierced through the bright light of the moon, in a moment a powerful wind followed through whisking away the welcome notice on the dining door. Streaks of lightning bolted the sky and rather instilled cold fear in Rufaro and Taurai. A moment of silence echoed from the time the light of the moon was driven off the earth by the dark clouds. Tendai was as calm as a winter morning and pretty much surprised by the frail reactions shown by the two.

She kept on shoving the last of her meal into her mouth with ease then reached out for her diary. The sound of screeching tires pounded the driveway and from the front door emerged a woman, soaked wet with water, holding a little girl by the hand. Taken by surprise, the three, Tendai, Rufaro and Taurai starred towards the door and none of them could speak a word. The calmness on Tendai's face collapsed slowly when the woman advanced to the table where they were seated. The girl looked at Taurai and made a leap on his lap,

“Daddy, I've been missing you! Where have you been?”

The words ripped Tendai's heart apart but she needed no explanation to what was happening.

A golden ring shone on the woman's hand, who maintained her dignity by fighting anger and emotions in a short abrupt sentence,

"Seven years of marriage and this is what you do behind my back?"

The emotional imbalance sealed Tendai's question on why he had suddenly ended their relationship. She tightly held her diary and stormed into her room with tears gathering down her chin. As was the last time, she woke up in the same hospital she had been admitted the same room, only one thing stood out of the picture, she vividly remembered everything from her youth, her first kiss and her loving sister.

She could see, feel everything and her sister's voice soothing her soul. She slowly closed her eyes and on the diary she wrote in block letters,

"NOMORE CHECKLISTS, LORD... FIND ME MR RIGHT!"

After closing the pages of her diary, she felt a chilling cold transcending from beneath her feet up to the brains. The moment she opened her eyes, she saw her body lifelessly laying on the bed, arms locked around her diary... she was now standing beside her sister and whispered slowly into her ears,

"Take care sister..."

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Reynold Sibanda

Sitting on the highest grounds of Zimbabwe, Mutare is a town that boasts of vast mountain ranges which according to legends and ancient myth is home to several mysteries which many say will never be solved. Danganvura is one of the suburbs in that city which is known for quiet, almost docile approach to life and its events. Life in the area is eventless almost boring and being surrounded by mountain ranges, the only passage into the area is through a pass cut into one of the mountains obviously by ancient civilisations or their predecessors such that most events that go on are shut off completely from the world around but the event of the mysterious, disappearing man was something else.

That he was the man who had sired five pregnancies in the space of one year, no one in the neighbourhood could actually believe. It seemed a patent impossibility looking at the near fragile, nearly hapless, huddled form of the man as he passed by, metres from where we stood. It seemed inconceivable but what else could we all say when even the biblical David

had managed to bring down mighty Goliath with the wave of a sling.

Dynamites, they always say, comes in small packages.

What else could anyone say when all the five young women with whom he was believed to have had several unprotected sexual escapades were all around him, displaying the bulging bellies for all to see though none seemed happy enough to be carrying his offspring as seen by the way they held his shirt. They all displayed evidence of unprotected sexual encounters in a careless way and seemed oblivious of everyone else except the old man, proving an old adage that hell has no fury like a woman scorned. It was as if to them everyone else had ceased to exist, as if the earth and its people, everything else had melted into nothingness and the only person who remained was that fragile old man

I, like all the other curious, jobless, drug peddling youths of the hood followed this unusual procession, this disturbance providing a change from the monotonous life of smoking pot on the bridges, horse betting and debating English football and sometimes the politics of the world. This was a welcome diversion to a life that had become somewhat monotonous, a human manuscript, punctuated only by the meals we ate and the times we slept. Everything else was predictable, an indication that we were probably unknowing actors in a movie, and our lives were written by scribes long since perished.

As we walked, I took a good look from amongst the jostling crowd at this mysterious man no one seemed to know, the man who might even probably turn celebrity overnight, for who else could date so many women at once. I scrutinised him from head to foot, the way a farmer scrutinises a new boy at the farm who applies for a man's job, taking in every detail, trying to figure out what exactly could have led these women to love him.

He was a thin man with limbs so long they became hunched and gave him the appearance of someone who was carrying something heavy on his back. He had a long thin face, with features so sharp he could have been sculptured by an angry sculpture. The man had a long English nose that ended in a kind of pointed form and his lips were huge and sagged as he walked revealing a row of tobacco stained teeth which were battered and broken they could have witnessed several brawls at some point in time. I

placed his years to somewhere around the early seventies for wrinkles were beginning to crease his face. The developing wrinkles gave him the wizened face of a tired monkey. Even as he was pulled here and there by the women, insulted by the young boys and laughed at by the old women, his expression did not change. His face had upon it a curiously wary impassivity, an expression in which only the eyes were alive.

Who exactly was this man?

Where did he come from?

These were unanswered questions that kept ringing in my head even as I followed the group, curiosity getting the better part of me. I couldn't afford to miss this action, for to hear it from someone else was a risk that I couldn't take. The boys always had a way of spicing up stories like this you could actually think it was a scene from Hollywood.

How did he convince these pretty young souls to sleep with him, for looking at him even I saw nothing attractive about him and by the way he was clothed he couldn't be a wealthy man. Even the way he carried himself left nothing to be desired. No rich man could carry himself carelessly like that, for he walked as if he were using a borrowed pair of legs, but as always girls were unpredictable, they could sleep with a man even because he could sing but even I couldn't imagine this man singing or if he did, then looks are really deceiving.

I turned my attention to the five would be mothers who were all ashen faced and each pulled a part of the man's clothing as if their very lives depended on it. They were all young maybe in their early twenties and each was beautiful in her own unique way, though all were physically equipped to be film actresses. Ugly as he himself looked, this man had a good taste. It was as if he moved from area to area selecting the best, or maybe he always targeted slenders as was the fashion, our fashion. Even I knew to myself that I couldn't resist such kind of ladies.

'Mudhara uyu zvinhu apa hona the type of ladies yaanobata,'I said to my friend Tiri.

He looked at me slowly, his movements nearly un-coordinated like an automaton, evidence of the illegal Bronco getting to his nerves. His eyes

were bloodshot and huge they could have been in the process of popping out and I felt the urge to push them back which I resisted. The drug always did that to people and we liked it for that, at least part of the day could actually pass without us noticing, living in a world of our own, the theatre of dreams. I could safely say that there are snatches, hours, or even days of our lives we couldn't even account for, when we were caught in this haze of Bronco but today I was only on dagga.

The smile that lit Tiri's face was forced as he nodded, 'Exactly my type.'

I doubted he meant it, for in that world there are even echoes of the divine and sometimes when the drugs gets to your inner being you even cease to think. I ignored Tiri and returned my attention back to the scene unfolding. I knew that later in the day Tiri will be the one narrating all this even though right now he was actually seeing nothing.

The crowd had become thick and the noise more and more pronounced as more and more women joined in, shouting, their voices with various tempos all merging to become one voice. It was a voice that couldn't be mistaken for any other voice, a voice always louder than all the rest, the voice of rage. Women, I realised ere always united when it came to issues like these.

I tried to find out where the man lived, his name, where he had met the women, but no one seemed to know, it was as if he had fallen from above shrouded in a cloud of mystery as thick as custard like the famed meteorite of Dotito. It was maybe probably the work of a talisman or juju, but whatever it was, I found myself wishing I also had it.

It was when I was still trying to figure out all this when suddenly a cry pierced the air that was already charged with excitement and in front of so many witnesses, the man broke free from those seemingly steel grasps of the women and broke into a run, his long legs which I had previously doubted could support him actually propelling him at a speed that could have put Usain Bolt to shame. His strides were long and the efforts of the women and the other men were futile as he skipped obstacles effortlessly in flight, with the knowledge that everything depended on his speed.

Like all the other boys, eager to impress I took off after the man,

shouting some words which seemed to have no meaning even to my own ears. I overtook the women who were mouthing chains of obscenities that could have come straight from the corridors of hell, and even there could have shocked the devilish proprietor himself and put his right hand men to shame.

Soon the man disappeared into the thicket that marked the beginning of the vast maize fields, leaving behind pieces of his clothing in the hands of the women and a shoe that was torn in front in a shape that resembled a grin. It was as if the shoe was laughing at the world and the women in eternal mockery. I and the other boys stopped but the girls cried as they gave chase but judging with the pace that the man had taken off with, we all knew this was a futile exercise.

The girls were all tears as they narrated how they had met the man, fell in love with him in five different regions of the city. They had all slept with him once before he disappeared but for all of them, judging by their bellies once was enough.

Whether by synchronicity, or the caprices of fate or the fore written inescapable scripts of destiny the five had all separately come to a church gathering where they had met the man. They all had instantly went for him but no one at the church seemed to know him and so they had dragged him off to go to the police...and that was how we had seen them.

His disappearance into the thicket was the last anyone ever saw of the mystery man again. He had seemingly vanished without a trace but many questions still remain unanswered.

Who is this man?

Is he real or was he just an illusion?

Was he a demon or a magician, or maybe even an apparition?

To this day, no one has had any answers yet and if ever there are to be answers, then obviously they couldn't miss us on our bridge, the bridge of drugs.

I ALMOST SAID I DO

Rudo Nyoni

I walk with my head down lest anyone should see the tears glistening in my eyes. If only they knew the pain I tried so hard to conceal, they'd understand why no smile lingers on my face. If they could read my mind they'd know that I'm the girl who almost said "I do".

So where do I start; the night he gazed up at me with eyes filled with love as he asked me to marry him or that fate-filled day when he gave me a lift to the church annual conference....I remember that day oh so well, so here goes my story of love found and lost.

It was a beautiful sunny day, the weather was just right and I was filled with so much expectation because of the word I had received at the conference. I had attended the morning service and had been uplifted and decided to get into town and get myself a light lunch before heading back. Lunch of course was a pack of grapes, I was once again on my crazy fruit diet, and since I'd spent all my money I decided to make the short trip back

to the ZITF grounds by foot, when I bumped into some of my ever so faithful friends from church. Boy did they make me laugh with all their insane stories but I had to remind myself that I was on schedule that I had to cut them short, and convinced them to walk me back to church. As we were walking and conversing lo and behold the man I'd been admiring now for a few months drove past us and parked a short distance ahead and called out to one of the guys I was with. I started blushing so hard hoping no one was noticing my change in walk and posture as I tried to compose myself. To my utter delight my friend asked my "crush" if he would give me a lift to church and he gladly accepted.

As I stepped into his car he went out to check the water pump, and I watched him from the corner of my eye admiring his face and the way he moved. I must admit I was infatuated almost obsessed with him (giggle) but I did my best to not show it on my face but rather started eating my grapes. Finally he came back into the car, and I offered him some of my grapes as a way to break the ice and took this time to get to know him better, like I had always imagined in my head a thousand times before. He took some of the grapes and gave me his gorgeous smile that gave me butterflies every time and right there and then I knew he was a man I wanted to be more than friends with. As he drove us to church, he politely asked me about my day, and how I was finding the conference and all the little things people call "small talk".

And I tried my best not to embarrass myself by keeping my answers as short as possible, after all doesn't every man want a mysterious woman, I consoled myself. He walked me into church and led me to my friend, Andrew, the friend who had asked him to take me back to church. I joined Andrew and his crew as the choir led us in praise and my crush left to run some church errands but promised he would be back. The atmosphere was charged, I could feel that something great was happening between him and me and I knew that this could be the man I'd been waiting for.

Our love story truly was something magical, so spiritual. He was my friend, my confidant, personal shopper, and my prayer partner. We spent almost every day together after that day, getting to know each other and he was the perfect gentleman, always opening doors for me, doing things for me, buying me flowers and never once asked for sex..and for me that made

me so content and happy.

I'm not sure when things began to unravel, maybe it was the spending too much time together or our age difference or very different family backgrounds. Whatever it was, it was breaking down our bond and communication. Yes though we fought over so much, still he would always apologise and always tried to make things right, but we were not a good fit for one another. Truth is I just wasn't his rib and I had not waited on God regarding our relationship and if we were truly meant to be. But despite all this he still proposed....

“Oh my gosh, I'm going to be late,” I said to my sister, as I tried not to panic.

“Aren't you always late though? But don't worry the concert starts in forty-five minutes hey and we are only two minutes away dear,” she replied as we approached the concert venue, a local restaurant, my heart started beating so fast, as I thought over the song I'd just rehearsed the day before with my guitarist. I really hoped it would turn out okay.

“Bye Dad, will call you as soon as the concert is over and all”, I called out as soon as I got of the car. I walked in and everything looked like it was falling into place. Part of the restaurant had been cornered off and the sound engineer was doing sound check for the artists who had also just arrived. Sound check went by so fast, I barely had time to get my levels fixed before the audience started coming in.

“Hey girl, you look gorgeous” Ashley, an acquaintance of mine, said as her eyes sparkled with joy.

I felt so awkward because it seemed as though everyone was being extra sweet, but I just brushed it off blaming nerves for my over analyzing. Soon the concert began, “This Is Love” and I was in awe of all the acts as they sang and the poets did their thing. Love certainly was in the air. Then I looked up and saw my baby, my man looking so good but so stressed and bothered. He wasn't really making an effort to make eye contact with me or even come and sit with me like he normally did. It probably was the fight we had earlier. I'd been feeling anxious and unsure about our relationship and whether he still loved me...

* * * * *

“We welcome on stage Thembie,” the master of ceremony interrupted my thoughts and I collected myself and put aside my fears.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming. I see so many faces her I haven’t seen in a while and I appreciate you being here .I will take you on a short journey of love, as you all know I am a minister of love, and my mission is to help build strong marriages and relationships through my music .I do hope you will enjoy my songs.” I began to sing and the crowd loved it. The passion in my eyes shone brightly as I looked at the man who had captured my heart and our hearts connected once more. Applause erupted as I ended and sat down. The master of ceremony then called the organizer of the event and to my surprise, it was my boyfriend Matthew. He made his way up to the sound of whistles and cheers as I clapped along oblivious to what was unfolding right in front of me.

“I’d like to thank you all for coming through tonight. These past few days have been hectic and I thank all the people involved with the planning of this event. I’d like to thank Thembie’s sister for...” Matthew stopped as the master of ceremony cut in and asked me to come up front as Matt had a song he wanted to sing to me. I went up thinking this was just another one of my boyfriend’s romantic gestures and as he held my hand singing to me in his beautiful voice, my heart melted, then he got down on one knee and sang “Will you marry me?”

His eyes were glazed with tears and so much love and for a moment I couldn’t talk and I heard people around me imploring me to answer. I nervously laughed and said to him “Yes, yes I’ll marry you”. I took the ring and put it on my finger and though it wasn’t a Beyoncé type of ring but it was perfect, because it represented his love, our love for one another. As he held me, I cried thinking to myself that this was everything I’d ever wanted and finally I was going to spend the rest of my life with the man I’d been praying for....well I thought that he was the one. Oh how wrong I was. That night was to be one of the very few blissful moments we would ever share. But for that night all was well with the world we had built around us.

As the months of wedding planning begun, things got crazy, as I was overworking meeting service providers, paying deposits, and the endless scheduling. I can't say it was fun or that I was filled with joy during this time. The engagement night was the last night I truly felt at peace and sure of my decision to marry him. In all the planning I felt Matt, move further and further away from me, he fought me on so much and wasn't active in the planning or in helping me work at paying the necessary funds required for the wedding. I felt so alone as I went for meeting after meeting, working weekends so I could secure service providers and he remained aloof and distant. He resented me you see, for choosing the decoration, the venue and limiting the number of guests. The venue I chose had been gifted by my aunt, and it was one of the most exclusive hotels in the city that I never thought he would be mad. He also wanted 350 guests yet our budget would not allow for that many people but he still insisted till we reached a compromise that we would have 250 guests, though I had wanted 200. Our communication seemed to result in more fighting than any progress in terms of planning, that we barely spoke as we used to. So we tried our best to have date nights and down time where we would only speak about anything but the wedding.

Despite all this, my heart was slowly moving away from him. All I had hoped for was slipping away from me, and we broke up a couple of times because of his lack of concern over the wedding and not wanting to postpone it and the treatment I was receiving from him and his family. But we would always get back together, as he had a way of saying everything I needed to hear to try again.

The final blow that was dealt came just seven days before the wedding. He had called me earlier asking to meet up and just talk. I thought this would be a good thing as things had been so strained.

"So I've brought you here because I have something I really need to tell you. I'm afraid of how you'll take this babe, but please know this has been heavy on my mind" He said with a sombre look upon his face.

Thoughts started rushing across my brain, was he breaking up with me, was he going to tell me he had cheated, all I knew was he had to get to the point before I lost my senses.

“I do hope you will forgive me” as he continued “and understand. I have been worried and stressed by business and certain deals have not come through as I had hoped and I lied about a contract job and so many other jobs I had said I had gotten. You were right I do need help, I am a serial liar and I’m afraid that I may have gone too far. You see the job that I had said would give me \$5 000, well it was actually

for \$500. I have managed to get payment for that job and unfortunately that is the only money I have. I don’t have money to finish paying lobola or for the wedding”, he said as my heart sank and he continued

“I’m hoping we can use it towards the wedding or towards the place we will get to stay at...”

I can’t hear anything anymore but the sound of my heart racing so fast, as my mind goes back to all the times I had tried to postpone the wedding, the times I had tried to help him with his business, but he had never wanted to show me his contracts telling me how I was paranoid and didn’t know anything about his business. I looked up at him through tears and I stood up and quietly told him “Don’t follow me, just leave me alone”

I rushed out so fast and went straight back home with tears running profusely down my face, my heart breaking with every step I took.

“Thembi stop, Thembi please slow down.” he said so loud it made me pause for just a moment, but I continued on walking and made my way into my yard as he followed me.

“Thembi please speak to me. I’m really sorry. I’ll do anything to make this right. I know I have a problem with lying and my pride got in the way of telling you the truth or getting help, but I know you can help me. I don’t want to lose you.” he kept speaking as I kept crying thinking of what I would tell the guests. The invites had been delivered; my family was flying down in a couple of days and what my grandfather would say about all this. I had to let this pain out, before it killed me. I grabbed the plate and threw it against the wall watching it shatter just like how I felt inside and quickly picked up the broken pieces and threw them in the bin, like the neat freak I was. He stopped talking as fear filled his face; he had never seen me this angry.

“Matt, how could you do this to me. You let me believe a lie, I defended you, and you let me pay for things telling me all was well? Where are we going to stay after the wedding if it happens, since you refused the place my mum had offered us? What are we going to do about the wedding” I couldn’t breathe as I tried to tell him what my head was thinking.

“Baby I can make it right, just tell me what to do,” Matt said in desperation. I collected myself and calmed down and we spoke heart to heart for the first time in months as we discussed on whether the wedding should continue or be postponed. We finally decided that the wedding should go on but with a smaller guest list due to the funds.

I forgave him for his betrayal and the way he had treated me the past few months because I believed he truly could change and that our love was strong enough to withstand anything, but little did I know that his love for me wasn’t enough for him to choose me. Just two days after concluding on the wedding, he changed his mind. He came to me and told me that he couldn’t continue with the wedding as is, because it wasn’t being done according to his father’s plans and instructions. That if we went through with the wedding his father would never speak to him again and that they would not show up for the wedding, and that he would lose his relationship with his father. He kept going on and on not knowing that with every word he was destroying my heart, killing our love and my soul. A part of me died that night as I realized that I wasn’t enough for him to leave his family that he was still under so much control that no matter how much I’d sacrificed that I would never be enough. He was not ready to take my side as my husband and this broke me.

“Thembi say something” he said.

I instead went to my room, took out the wedding bands he had bought and removed my engagement ring. I returned to him and gave him back the rings and said “Matthew it seems you’ve made your decision. You really have broken my heart. My family was willing to accept the required lobola after the wedding and pay for the wedding except the contribution your side of the family was asked to make yesterday .All you had to do was pay for your side of the guest list. We were going to pay for the décor, the cake, photographer and the rentals for our new place. All you had to do was a pay a small amount. So since your father means more to you than me and

you don't care what this is doing to me...it's over."

I slammed the door shut on his stunned face and collapsed as I screamed my heart shattering over and over again. My sister came running in and my brother close behind confused and in a panic over what had just transpired. They tried to get me to speak but all I could say was "It's over, he postponed the wedding, it's over" I kept repeating as though with each time I said it the pain would lessen. My world crumbled around me and I could have never predicted that he would be the one to cause me the worst pain I'd ever experienced.

My days and nights all just collided into a sense of nothingness that at times I felt I was losing my mind, as sleep disappeared from my life. I couldn't take any calls, or let any of my friends come and console me. All I wanted was to be alone with my pain, to just lay in bed and slowly die but my family would not let me, as they kept watch over me day and night afraid I might take my life into my own hands. No one understood that a part of me had been ripped out, my soul buried in a mass of grief and despair.

Each hour seemed to disappear into another as I woke up to the day of my "wedding". Tears filled my eyes as they normally did these days, as I looked at my specially designed imported wedding dress, knowing that I would never walk down the aisle in it. That there would be no makeup squad, no giggling or excited bridesmaids, no groom waiting for me to say "I do". This was instead my funeral, my wake, my day to lay to rest my heart, my hopes for a marriage, for a future I once thought was so bright with the man I love. There would be no relatives running around the house singing wedding songs, only silence ensued as my family tried their best to cheer me up with verses from the Bible.

As I gazed at my beautiful white and gold wedding cake, looking at the gold and white sparkling balls covering the cake, I assigned where each tier should go to and it hit me, "I almost said I do".

NEO, THE GIFT

Nqobizwe Malinga

The first time it happened, my husband had already gone to his night shift. The last rays of the sun were peeping through the horizon as dusk was approaching when I made my way into the yard from escorting him, and I noticed from a distance a figure sitting close to my door step. It was what appeared to be a little girl of about four or five years old.

I moved closer to satisfy my curiosity, and the little one noticed me, but made no movement. Tightening the cloth around my waist, I opened my mouth to speak.

‘Dumela ngwanake,’ I greeted her, but she did not respond. It was there that I could be able to see her face clearly. She wore a thick black dress that already looked greyish with dirt, and had long unkempt hair seemingly plaited into tiny locks with sand all over. Her fingers were sunk deep into the parched sand as she fixed her huge watery eyes on me, but still made no sound.

‘What is your name, and where do you live, my child?’ I asked, ignoring what I had perceived as her stubbornness, but still, she responded with cold

silence.

‘Who is your mother?’ I raised my voice, but she fixed her eyes on me and sunk her fingers deeper into the sand, close-mouthed. Something whispered to me that she could have been a homeless child, but I undoubtedly knew all children in the compound and her face looked nothing familiar. Her somewhat display of impertinent behaviour was what startled me.

‘What do you want here, ngwanyana? Are you going to disrespect me in my own house, little one? Be polite enough to answer someone old enough to be your mother!’ I barked.

Silence.

She appeared not a single bit perturbed by my words. Instead, blinked her first from the moment she fixed her eyes on me, still buried her hands into the sand and made no sound. Her face looked quite pale and dusty, as if she’d literally been exhumed from underground. It was then that I ascertained that I was not going to entertain any rude attitude from a stranger in my yard - homeless child or not.

I stormed into the house and went for my husband’s old belt that had been chewed by rats on the edges a while back, grabbed it and went back outside in lightning bolt speed, murmuring curses as I moved. Opening the door out, I met the greatest shock of the day.

She was gone.

I searched the whole yard, in the outdoor pantry and peeped in the backyard as well, but she had disappeared. She looked nowhere near the sight of my yard, and there was nowhere she could have paced away within the time I was gone.

Nights without Phemelo always felt sombre and cold. I understood his plight by daylight, and the need for him to work overnight for us to survive, but by nightfall all my rationality sunk with the sun, and would almost go mad in loneliness as the silence of the house embraced me tightly. After all, no woman enjoys the absence of her husband, especially at night - where we are most vulnerable and comfortless. The security company had

promised a possible redesign of his duty shift, he had said, and I looked forward to spending more nights with him than the short-lived afternoons.

Our house was pretty small, but felt quite huge when I was alone, especially with no children...

Phemelo arrived at about half past six as he usually did.

I was wide awake, and he always hated finding me awake. 'I see dry tears on your face,' he said, as he tucked into bed. I had not realized that I had cried, but it wasn't the first time.

'It's nothing really.' I lied, 'It's just that I spoke harshly to a homeless kid yesterday. I shouldn't have scared her away.'

The tall man placed his hands around my body and whispered, forcing a little smile. 'You know, it's time you really stopped worrying about other people's children. We went through this, dear, I don't know why you keep stressing yourself.' his hands felt cold. I tried to stop a tear stream from coming out, but it broke free from my eyelids and ran down my cheeks slowly. My husband caressed my arm softly and I could feel his words boiling from within his chest as I lay on him.

'You are my biggest treasure, sweetheart, my wife. Nothing will ever change my love for you, not even....'

'Barrenness!' I interjected, breaking free from his arms, 'Your own dear wife is barren Phemelo! Do you think your love for me will change that, huh?' I screamed, breaking into a sorrowful wail. The poor man tried to calm me down but even I could not control myself.

'I have been mocked for the past four years, being called all sorts of names, Phemelo. Fruitless,

useless, witch, baby-eater!...and all you tell me is nothing changes that!? For how long will I

shame myself with this, shame your family for that matter! You think I don't know that your

family wants you to remarry? You think I'm not aware gore mme

wagago wants another wife?

Go ahead! Marry whoever they wish, and stop comforting me with words out of reality.”

Phemelo could only but sigh.

‘I’m not marrying anyone else.’

I had fallen asleep on a chair in my yard one afternoon, enjoying the rare summer breeze, when a cold presence caught my attention and woke me up. I opened my eyes and almost leaped off the chair in shock. There, in front of me, was the young girl I had seen days back.

Her face looked exactly the same, still as pale as ever with a layer of white dust. She still wore the same dress, this time with pieces of dry leaves and small splinters hanging from it. By the time I woke up, she was smiling, but when I opened my mouth to speak, she suddenly tied up her face to a sinister frown.

“Ngwanake, Who are you?” I asked politely, but she gave no answer. “Answer me.” I demanded, but the strange child never took her apple eyes away from me. She slowly sat down on the dry sand, and sunk her fingers deep into the soil - her eyes still on me.

I looked at her for a while, and concluded that I was going to ignore her.

“If you are going to sit over there and play mum, I will do the same.” I remarked, settling on the chair and going back to my slumber position as if to ignore her, when in actual fact, wanted to see what she was going to do. To my surprise, the girl took no heed of my statements, lifted her fingers off the sand and sunk them again, her huge watery eyes still fixed on mine.

I closed my eyes, and marvelled at such a strange occurrence. She definitely was no normal child, I thought, maybe even out of this world.

I opened my eyes, and she was gone.

A cold feeling of fright went down my spine. I stood up and looked around, pinched myself and was thoroughly convinced that it was no dream. I spurted incomplete words in shock, rushed inside the house with

my hands on my cheeks. Could she be a ghost? If so, why did she come

to me? A million questions raced in my head, but I wasn't sure if I still was alive myself. Phemelo found me sleepless the following morning, after a long night of terror and countless nightmares. I never bothered to tell him about the girl. I knew what his reaction would have been. 'You stress yourself too much dear,' he was going to say, 'I told you that I'm not going

to entertain any discussions pertaining to our condition. Now look at you....you see hallucinations....its time you stopped worrying yourself.'

He never bothered to trouble me with any question as well.

The afternoon rays bounced on my dark brown skin as I sat outside in deep thought. I somehow desired to see the young girl again. I had questions. I definitely knew she wasn't going to answer, but still wished to see her - talk to her. The memory of her last appearance surely gave me goose bumps, but I somehow began to yearn to see her.

The longing grew more towards dusk when Phemelo had gone to work. I grew sick the same way a mother grows sick for a missing child, and before evening covered the earth, my tears began to flow.

I screamed at the top of my voice out in the dark, tried to call the child whose identity I never knew, shouting all sorts of names I could think of. The girl never appeared. My soft cries grew more into painful lamentations. I cried for the girl. I cried to God, for denying me the pride of womanhood, to Phemelo, for his optimism that never seemed to work out. I cried my pain and frustration out, until my voice faded, my eyes at the point of running out of tears. I looked as I stood on the surface of my yard, across the fence, the young child never appeared.

The two-plate stove we had always made regular noises when the coil got hot. I was making soup later on in the evening, humming away my loneliness to the sounds it made. I felt very light, as if crying had unburdened me. It was before long that I heard a feint voice behind my back.

"Mama"

I turned around slowly, and noticed a face I found quite familiar. The ghostly child I had happened to miss.

“You...” I was short of words. I made my way towards her, but she drifted back.

“So you can talk?” I asked, and she gave no reply. I took a plate and spoon, filled it with soup, and placed it on the floor next her. “Here, have this.” I offered. She never moved.

“Can you at least tell me your name.” I pleaded, the weaker side of me entertaining a bit of fear.

“I can be your mother, you know, don’t be afraid of me.”

The little girl never responded.

I turned around to switch off the stove. Who was this girl, I asked myself. When I turned back to her, there she was, sitting down cross legged, licking the soup off the spoon with her eyes still on me. A feeling of happiness crept into me when I saw her eating my food. Could ghosts eat, I continued firing a dozen questions to myself. After a while of starrng at her, she stopped eating and focused all her attention on me. I somehow began to think that my eyes annoyed her, so I turned back, switched on the stove and hoped she would continue feasting on the soup.

I walked slowly towards the bedroom and she stood up and followed me.

“No, child, eat.” I told her, but she starred at me and ignored the plate I was pointing to. She opened her mouth, and my burning curiosity rose to its peak as I waited for the young one’s words to come out.

“Mmetsi” she whispered. “I want water.”

I sped into the kitchen sink like a mad kangaroo and filled a cup with water. When I turned to make my way back to her, she was right beside me.

“Don’t leave me, mama.” She whispered. I knelt down to her and

noticed she was smiling. I could not hold back my tears, and remark, “I won’t, my child.”

She shook her head and smiled even more noticeably.

“You looked for me today, mama, but I was here with you. I’ve always been here. When you wake up I’m always with you. Even when you go to buy from the market, I go with you. I’ve always been here with you but you don’t see me. I’m the gift you don’t see. You said you want to be my mother, but you are my mother mama, you are the only mother I’ve ever known, but you don’t see me. I have been sitting on your doorstep for years, and you don’t see me. You don’t believe I exist. I exist, mama.” She said, her voice filled with very weak breath.

At that point my wailing got uncontrollable, she wiped my tears, and her face began to glow as she smiled. I noticed how her words reflected the painful truth. The truth of how I had been blinded by negativity for such a long time.

“I’m sorry, my child,” I struggled to speak, “I promise...I will not leave you. You are my gift. O neo yame.”

I could see from the corner of my tear filled eyes, the strange little girl fading slowly, up until all I could see was the wall behind her.

It was only but two months later, that I could not wait to tell my husband the good news.

“I’m pregnant,” I smiled as the words slithered out of my mouth, ‘I’m with child, Phemelo, a girl child.’ Watching as an expression of triumph and confusion emerged on his face, I knew he was so shocked he could hardly celebrate.

“Girl?” He queried, “How do you know it’s a girl?”

I smiled as I gently rubbed the surface of my tummy, feeling a warm presence inside.

“It’s Neo.” I said, “She is coming.”

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ambitious B. Tavenga

Ambitious Blessing Tavenga was born on 13 November 1992 at Mt. St. Mary's mission in Wedza. He did his primary education at Lochinvar Primary school from 1991-2001 and later on transferred to Gumbonzanda primary in 2001-2003 and later finished at Mt. St. Mary's in 2005. He jokingly says that his primary schooling was a nomadic adventure. In 2006, he began his secondary education at Glenorah High School and later Specis College in 2009 where he finished his Advanced Level. His writing is dedicated to Simbarashe Masendu, his long time friend who used to read his poems, and also, Lindelwa Masunda, his fiancé and his father, Gracious Tavengwa who has always supported him. In his own words "Art has become my life, I live art every day of my life". Mr. Tavenga is currently working on scripts and a play novel called "The More Than The Ordinary".

Blessing R. Makunde

Blessing Rumbidzayi Makunde was born on 20 May 1995. She is the second born and last daughter in a family of 3. She grew up Marondera and her education includes Nyameni Primary School, Cherutombo High School and her Advanced Level at Nyameni High School and currently studying at Nyadire Teachers College. Her arts background started at an early age. She did poetry acting since primary school before taking up short story writing when she was in grade 6. At high school she took part in the Petsimeredu Edutainment Trust, Daily News and News Day literary competitions. Her arts passion has followed her at tertiary level as she is the college's chief news anchor and editor. She also did double act on a stage play called "Green and Sexy" written and directed by Mandla Moyo. She has bagged several literary arts awards including 3rd place (poetry category) TIFAZ

2017. Blessing is very passionate about writing and about sensitization of girl child issues. She is currently working on a documentary novel and other several literature.

Brendon T. Kasiri

Brendon Tanaka Kasiri is a Zimbabwean budding novelist born to a loving family on the 16th of April, 1998. He began writing when he was in high school and he is currently studying International Studies at Midlands State University. He has produced various literary works which include “Till Eternity” (novella), “Rising Young” (a motivational book), and “Bingo For Trouble”(a short story) which are yet to be published.

Kelvin Mangwende

Kelvin Mangwende was born in Murehwa at St. Pauls, and is the grandson of Chief Mangwende. He is a poet, essayist, and a playwright. His collection of poems titled “Misodzi Yerombe” came second at NAMA Awards in 2017. He was a story teller resident at Sam Nujuma kindergarten. His interests includes travelling and experiencing different cultures. He has stayed in Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Angola and Mozambique. He started writing when he was still at primary school. He has been featured in Best New African Poets 2016 Anthology. His poems are in several anthologies including Chitubu Chenorimbo.

Natasha L.N. Karimakwenda

Natasha L.N. Karimakwenda is a chemist who was born in Harare but grew up in Bulawayo. She started writing 2016 beginning with poetry. She has written a script and is currently is working on a book and another play.

Nqobizwe Malinga

Nqobizwe Malinga was born on the 24th of May 1998 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He did his primary education at Mtshingwe Primary School in Bulawayo before transferring to Gaborone, Botswana. He however wrote his Ordinary and Advanced level back home in Bulawayo at Luveve High School. Nqobizwe started writing at the age of 12, though his passion for reading began earlier. During his tenor at high school he won several literary, public speaking and debate awards. He has written several short stories and poems that have been featured in various newspapers including The Sunday Mail (Bridge Section) and The Bulawayo Bulletin Newspaper. The young writer is yet to begin his tertiary education and hopes to have countless publications in the future.

Prince Gwezuva

Prince Gwezuva is the second child in a family of three and partly bred in Masvingo. He attended Runyararo Primary School in 2001 and Mucheke High School in 2008. He completed his Advanced levels at Masvingo Christian College. He says “I found myself trapped in the alphabet’s claws majoring on the particular theme of love and seemingly grew interest writing pieces that defined it in writing pieces that defined it in some other way”. He has published three anthologies which are “Of Love, Roses, Chocolates and Thorns”, “I’m That Scar You Named Love” and “Time-Tale”. He is a poet, speaker, script writer and composer.

Reynold Sibanda

Reynold Sibanda is the fifth born in a family of six who grew up in the ghetto of Dangamvura in Mutare. He did his primary education at Chirowakwame Primary School in Mutare and his secondary education at Helm Secondary, Rusunguko High School and Dangamvura High School. His passion for art and writing and began in the early years of his life when his master piece essays used to be read for the whole school both in his primary and secondary education. He has got an insatiable passion for both visual and literary arts which saw him scoop the National Child Of Peace

Award in 2013 and the YETI National Youth Essay Award in 2012 among others. He published his debut work “Life As We Live It”, a collection of short stories in 2016, and later a debut novel Identity Quest in 2017. He is currently studying engineering and also working on another novel.

Rudo Nyoni

Rudo Nyoni is a singer and songwriter who has a passion for writing short stories and poems. She is born and raised in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She is a daughter of pastors who taught her from an early age the importance of a relationships and God. Her desire is to share life as a testimony to help other women and men to make better choices in life in regard to relationship hence her story is based on her life experiences. Rudo holds a degree in Accounting Science and works part time as a real estate consultant.

Tafadzwa Mahachi

Tafadzwa Mahachi is a Zimbabwean born in Harare and author of debate books and motivational articles. He is married and has a lovely daughter who is his inspiration for writing. Tafadzwa enjoys spending time outdoors and camping. He is also a public speaker and creative genius. His contribution to this work is a new venture into fiction which he seeks to pursue later in life.

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More anthologies on the way. For more such stories, feedback, questions, comments, queries, future contributions, updates, publishing, or to collaborate with one of the authors, contact The Editor.

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